

# SOVIET LITERATURE

*Monthly*

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PEREKOP—OLES GONCHAR

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# SOVIET LITERATURE

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VITALI ZAKRUTKIN

## THE SUNFLOWER

Slowly the myriads of snow-white cloudlets trailed eastward across the spring sky, for all the world like a great flock of newly washed fine-fleeced sheep being driven over an azure plain by an unhurried herdsman.

Down below, like a shadow cast by the heavenly herds against the cold April steppe, as boundless as the sky above, another flock, herded by shaggy dogs, made its way through the soggy, barren expanse leaving a dark trail in the brown mud.

This was the first time the sheep had come out into the steppe after the long hungry months in their winter quarters. Lean and unwashed, the colour of the brown clayey earth, they plodded on with heads hanging low, barely able to move their weak, thin-shanked legs, hungrily reaching for the wet stubble, the prickly brown *tipchak*, the black wormwood and sparse leadwort and chewing at the hard, dry leaves as they followed the Old Man who strode ahead, leaning heavily on his staff.

Everybody in these parts called the veteran herdsman the Old Man. Perhaps only the book-keeper of the state sheep ranch deep in the heart of the steppe knew his real name, for it was the book-keeper's job to make out the payroll every

month. The Old Man himself never came in for his money, which was taken to him out in the range by the driver of the water-cistern lorry.

The Old Man had lived all his long life in this inhospitable plain country that rolled on with hardly a human habitation to break its desolate monotony from the Cossack settlements beyond the Don to the yellow sands of the Caspian seaboard and from the Terek to the great bulge of the Volga. Here there were no green woods, no bright glades, not even brushland—nothing but wormwood and *tipchak* and feather-grass that rustled in the wind, and salt marshes with their dead white crust. And silence, the eternal silence which even the occasional herds of fleet-footed steppe antelopes and the solitary eagles soaring in the sky could not break, reigned.

The Old Man had long been accustomed to silence. He rarely had more than a word or two to say to his helpers, and he was just as sparing of words with his sheep, Serko the wolf-hound, the sun, the cranes coursing overhead, and the flood waters that rippled through the gullies and ravines in the spring only to vanish without trace into the thirsty, hungry earth.

Tall, broad-shouldered, with a powerful chest, the Old Man strode on without as much as a glance behind. Nothing ruffled the sombre expression on his weather-beaten face, and the lips under the grey moustache were set in a hard line. Behind him came the obedient flock, and he knew it could not stray, for on its right was old Badma, wearing as always his stiff horsehide jacket, and the young dark-haired Cossack Yevdokim, whom the shepherds called Donka and who, for all his endless singing, would be no less alert and watchful of the sheep.

The Old Man had known Badma for a good sixty years. Both had worked before the Revolution for Mazayev, the Baptist sheepman, and then, until the early part of the war, they had herded sheep for the state farm. Badma had lived several years in Siberia working as a lumberjack, but after sending his daughter to technical school came back to his old haunts in the steppe to look up the Old Man and ask him to fix him up as his helper.

Donka was a handsome young man with a powerful physique and a hot-tempered, pugnacious nature. Two years before he had got into a fight over a village girl and had stuck a knife into his lucky rival and had been sent to prison for it. After serving his sentence he had gone to the steppe. At first the Old Man had mistrusted Donka, and been rather short with him, but in the end he had softened. That happened the previous winter when Donka had gone out in a snow-storm to search for two stray lambs and after a night's wandering in the steppe had come back with his face and hands frost-bitten but the lambs safe and sound, tucked inside his coat for warmth.

As the Old Man strode on and on along the soggy, still cold steppe, he thought about Badma and Donka and the hungry sheep, and his keen eyes missed nothing that came within their ken. A starling burst out from a clump of black wormwood, a harbinger of spring; it soared, gave a short but exultant trill that ended as suddenly as it had begun, as if it had dissolved in the transparent, boundless pale-blue of the sky. Then on the right the Old Man's eye caught the

tender green of a strip of early meadow grass showing through the brown, wind-beaten tangle of last year's feather-grass.

But what was this?

A flock of snow-white swans flew low overhead with a measured beating of wings. Every now and then they broke formation and exchanged anxious calls that reached down to earth like the dying echo of a distant bell.

Thinking of the great birds winging their way northward to their summer quarters, the Old Man felt a sharp pang of envy deep down in his heart for these feathered migrants whose good fortune it was to survey huge rivers, seas, even oceans, everything the old shepherd was never fated to see, not even in his dreams.

When the flock had vanished in the distance, the shepherd's eye caught a lone straggler trailing far behind in its wake. It must have been wounded by a fowler, or been injured somehow during the long journey, for it was obviously in trouble. It flew very low above the ground, dipping now and again to one side and righting itself again.

"What's happened to you, son?" the Old Man spoke out loud in pity for the crippled bird.

But no sooner had the word "son" passed his lips than he felt the long-buried memory of his lost son stirred again and his aching heart seemed ready to burst.

The Old Man had had only one son. His wife had died soon after the child was born and the Old Man had brought him up himself. He had fed him on sheep's milk and had carried him about the steppes in his arms, refusing to part with him even when he drove the sheep to distant pastures. And the lad grew up a round-faced, rosy-cheeked youngster. From early spring to late autumn he ran about barefoot, for months on end his hair remained untrimmed and his pale-gold uncombed locks shone like flower petals. When he grew older his father, on the advice of learned people, sent him to school. At first the boy came back to the steppes from the city where he studied, but as time went on his visits became fewer. The Old Man missed him sorely, but was secretly proud of his son.



Vitali Zakrutkin is 50 years old. He spent his childhood and youth in the Ukraine, the Far East and the Don area.

At first the future writer worked as village librarian and schoolmaster, but he subsequently completed a post-graduate course at Leningrad Pedagogical Institute, and from 1936 till the Great Patriotic War was head of the Department of Literature at the Rostov Pedagogical Institute. During this period he published a series of essays on literary problems and a novel, Academician Plyushchev.

During the war Zakrutkin worked as war correspondent. He fought in many battles on the Southern Front, in the Caucasus, in the taking of Berlin. During that period he published several collections of war-stories and two novels. After the war Notes on the Caucasus appeared in print.

In 1947 he settled in the Cossack village of Kochetovskaya-on-Don. The Floating Stanitsa, a novel about fishermen, came out in 1951.

In 1956 the first volume of the novel The Creation of the World, a novel about life in the Soviet Union in 1921-1927 was published.

Then came the war and his son went to the front. He wrote seldom and sent no photographs, and every day, every night the father thought of his little round-faced son with his shining locks far away at the front and imagined him perishing amid the smoke and the flames and the din of battle.

The brief death notice came at the very end of the war. The director of the state farm carried it around in the pocket of his canvas cape for a long time before he could bring himself to deliver it. At last he drove out to the pasture, found the Old Man and, looking him in the eyes, showed him the slip of paper with the stamp on it, and read it aloud in a thick voice:

"Defending the honour and independence of the Soviet Motherland . . . your son . . . died the death of a hero . . . in the Battle of Berlin . . . buried in a common grave on Seelow Hills . . ."

The Old Man did not weep then. But his face turned dark as lead. He took the slip of paper from the director, folded it neatly and moved off with bowed shoulders after his flock. Nor did he weep on the day when his son's decoration, a crimson-and-gold star, came to the state farm.

The years passed. The Old Man who had never learned to read knew every word of that death notice by heart, and when he was alone he would utter those words, each one of which smote at him like a hammer blow: "Died the death of a hero . . . buried in a common grave. . . ."

Now too as he plodded on before his flock and looked after the wounded swan, he whispered hoarsely:

"A common grave. . . Then he isn't alone. . . There must be many others with him."

At the sound of steps behind him the Old Man turned. It was Badma. Swarthy-skinned, with high cheek-bones and slightly slanting eyes, he stopped, chewed at his thin, greying whiskers and looked questioningly at the Old Man.

"What is it, Badma?" the Old Man asked.

Badma drew his shabby old horsehide jacket around him.

"We have to turn the flock to the right. The gully is over to the right, and you turned left. There's no water on the left."

"To the right? How's that?" the Old Man said angrily. "We haven't reached the three hollows yet."

"They're over that way," said Badma pointing with his staff. "We've got to turn right, I tell you."

"Very well, turn right. . . ."

The three alkali hollows of which Badma spoke lay at the end of a gully that wound through the steppe. The flood waters remained in the gully throughout the spring, and although by the end of spring most of the water evaporated and what was left had a bitter, brackish taste, the hardy sheep drank it with relish.

With the help of the dogs the flock was turned right and driven over to the water. The sheep drank lazily, bleating and jostling one another.

Choosing a dry spot, the Old Man shouted to Badma to stop.

While the Old Man and Badma were settling the sheep, Donka drove an iron hook into the ground, hung a copper cauldron of water on it, gathered some wormwood and started a fire. The damp wormwood burned badly, and Donka had to add some wind-dried feather-grass to it before the bright flame leapt up at last sending a cloud of smoke into the faces of the men seated about the fire.

"That's what I call a fire!" said Donka, blinking from the acrid smoke. Badma sat staring thoughtfully at the flames. Clasping his knees with his small dark-skinned hands, he said:

"In Siberia there are great forests. Wherever you go there is nothing but forest. The taiga they call it. We lived in the taiga, felling trees. But at night we used to dream of the steppes. We dreamed we were walking across the steppes; not a tree to be seen for miles around, nothing but the sky and the earth and the sun shining, and herds of brown horses and sheep grazing. . . ."

The Old Man said nothing. He was watching the lively Donka prancing around the fire throwing bits of dried mutton into the pot.

"One year passed, two years passed, year after year went by," Badma continued, swaying from side to side as he spoke. "I wanted to go back to the steppes. People tried to persuade me to live in the town, but I said: 'No, I want to herd sheep.'"

"Put plenty of salt in, and don't be stingy with the onions," the Old Man instructed Donka.

A white-tailed eagle floated proudly over the gully, its wings outspread. From its unattainable height it scanned every bush, every clump of grass, every hollow in the monotonous brown surface. But the chill earth still slept.

A gust of wind swept over the steppe, rustling the feather-grass.

Donka took the bubbling cauldron off the hook. The shepherds cut bread, and for a while the clatter of wooden spoons was the only sound to be heard. Three wolf-hounds lay some distance away watching every movement of the men. The Old Man threw them each a piece of bread.

When the mutton stew had been eaten, Badma pulled out a home-made pipe, stuck it into his mouth but did not attempt to light it.

"No tobacco, eh?" asked Donka with a grin.

The Old Man frowned and began feeling in the pockets of his olive-green army jacket. He turned out each pocket carefully and shook on to his palm the grains of *makhorka* and tobacco dust. Running a finger over his palm to cast aside the bread crumbs and small wads of cotton-wool, he found a sunflower seed, a small grey seed with a white edging.

"Look at the Old Man," chaffed Donka with a wink. "He must have pretty strong teeth if he can chew sunflower seeds."

The Old Man took off his cap and laid the tiny seed gently inside it.

"I never chewed sunflower seeds in my life," he said hoarsely. "They don't grow here. This is my son's jacket I'm wearing. I put it on today for the first time."

Donka dropped his eyes in confusion.

"Well, let's light up then," said Badma, breaking the awkward silence.

They divided all the *makhorka* and tobacco dust that had been found in the pockets into two equal parts and lit their pipes.

"I don't know what you see in these steppes," said Donka, lying on his stomach chewing a dry grass stalk absently. "It's a deadly place if you ask me. Even the sheep can hardly stand it. And the soil is barren. Nothing grows here except wormwood. You ought to see the soil in the Don valley. That's proper soil for you!"

The Old Man's grey eyes narrowed and his bushy brows met. He turned away and seemed lost in thought.

Badma stared thoughtfully into the distance where the heavenly sheep flocks were now huddled together in a mass over the greyish-purple horizon.

"Wait, lad," he said. "The sun will turn warmer and the *honin-sara*, the Month of the Sheep will come. Then the steppes will be decked with flowers like a young bride. The sheep will begin to give milk, lots of milk, and hearts will be glad. . . ."

The Old Man paid no heed to the herdsmen. His fingers felt for the knife that hung from his belt. Pulling it out, he wiped it on his trousers and began digging into the moist earth. He thrust the knife in deeper and deeper, lopping off and casting aside the roots of the feather-grass and wormwood and gradually widening the patch of loosened soil. He picked up some dry sheep's dung, and rubbed it into the soil, and smoothed out the earth.

"What's he doing?" Donka asked in surprise.

Badma shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't know. Ask him yourself."

The Old Man did not say a word. He took the sunflower seed out of his hat and put it into his mouth. Then he went over to the hole he had dug, stuck a gnarled finger into the middle, spat the seed on to his palm, dropped it into the hole, and covered it with the soft fertilized soil.

Badma sitting beside the smouldering embers watched the Old Man with pity in his eyes. He wanted to tell him then and there that no sunflower could ever grow in this alkaline soil, that all his trouble would be for nothing. But he only shook his head and asked:

"Think it'll grow?"

"Yes, I think it will," replied the Old Man.

"Maybe the steppe has changed?"

"No, the steppe hasn't changed."

Badma rose and went over to the dark little patch of freshly dug earth, glanced at it and laid a hand on the Old Man's shoulder.

"Do you know that bit of ploughland over by the far winter shelter?" he asked slowly. "A big field—about a hundred dessiatines I'd say it was."

The Old Man nodded.

"Old Mandjik ploughed it up, remember? That was a long time ago, before the Revolution. He wanted to grow wheat. He ploughed deep—five pairs of oxen and camels he harnessed to his plough. And what happened?"

"I know," said the Old Man.

"Remember? He nearly ruined his cattle planting that wheat. And then the drought came and killed it. Since then nothing has ever grown there. Nothing comes up out of the ground except salt."

"I'll water it," said the Old Man.

Badma's chapped lips quivered.

"What with? Our water's half salt. . . ."

The slopes of the gully by the three hollows now became the stopping place for many of the local shepherds and their flocks. They came here not only to water the sheep and rest for a while beside the water, but because they had all heard about the sunflower and were eager to see whether it would come up or not.

Before long a ring of flattened grass strewn with cigarette butts formed at a respectful distance around the little mound the Old Man had dug. The shepherds would sit there during the midday rest hours puffing on their self-made cigarettes and gazing expectantly at the little mound. They did not talk much, confining themselves to an occasional observation:

"Nothing will come of it."

"You never can tell."

"No. It's no use!"

"Course not. Not on these salt plains."

"Don't be too sure. The Old Man knows what he's doing."

When the Old Man appeared the herdsmen would fall silent. They all loved this tall, sturdy old shepherd with a love that was slightly tinged with fear. After all, he knew his job better than all of them, he could doctor the sheep when they were sick, find grazing grounds for the flock earlier than anyone else, knew when and how to wean the lambs from the ewes, and his sheep produced more fine-fleeced, smooth, silken wool than any others. No one wanted to quarrel with the Old Man or earn his displeasure.

When he came up with his heavy lumbering gait, his long staff over his shoulder, and his wolf-hound Serko at his heels, the shepherds would move away from the freshly-dug mound and avert their eyes as if the fate of the sunflower seed the Old Man had planted did not interest them in the least.

For his part the Old Man seemed not to notice the eager curiosity of the herdsmen. Indeed he did not even go near the mound while they were there. Spreading his cape on the grass some distance away, he would sit and watch Badma and Donka leading the sheep to the hollows.

With Donka too the shepherds had latterly begun to be on their guard. This happened after the day when, coming across a group of five herdsmen sitting around the sunflower bed, he had seen fit to warn them:

"Now see here, friends. You think it was just any old seed the Old Man planted in here? Well, you're mistaken. He found it in his dead son's pocket. So if that flower comes up, you'd better see you don't . . . well, you know what. . . ."

A glance at Donka's iron fists and the muscles standing out on his powerful neck was enough to show what he meant.

No one answered except an elderly herdsman called Uncle Foka who said in a mocking tone:

"What're you trying to frighten us for, snub-nose? Wait till it comes up."

When the shepherds had gone with their flocks and the Old Man was left alone with his own helpers he shifted his cape over to the little mound, sat down with his legs crossed and gazed at the small patch of dark earth among the green grasses where the sunflower had been planted.

The steppe grasses grew. Spring asserted itself more and more with each passing day and the sun poured down its rays lavishly. And as the triumphal march of spring gained pace the rusty brown stands of last year's weeds vanished and the steppe garbed itself in the tender green of young grass. An incessant chorus of birdsong hung over the plain, and in the seclusion of the grass countless animals, birds and insects mated and built nests or dug burrows so as to raise and leave behind progeny in keeping with the eternal laws of life.

"Beautiful!" said Badma, surveying the steppe with delight. "Nothing like it anywhere."

The Old Man did not seem to notice the awakening of the steppes. He went calmly about his work as usual, choosing the best pastures, leading his flocks to them, bathing and shearing the sheep. But Badma and Donka knew that one thought occupied his mind to the exclusion of all else: would the sunflower come up or not.

"What if it doesn't," Donka whispered. "What do you think, Badma?"

Badma pursed his weather-beaten lips.

"Who can tell? But even if it does come up it can't live long."

In the meantime the sunflower seed lay motionless in its soft, warm, moist cradle, until one day at some unknown hour when the sun's warmth pierced the earth, the seed came to life. It began to swell inside the tight husk. A tiny rootlet and an embryonic stalk began to form in spite of the constricting pressure of the hard husk. One straining downward, the other forcing its head upward, they pressed harder and harder against the shell around them until it burst and the living seed was free of its fetters. Fed by the root, the tender sprout pushed up and up through the earth until it broke through the last layer of the dry soil and emerged from the cramped darkness into the untrammelled cool infinity of a world filled with fresh air.

It was a quiet, moonless night. The stars twinkled. A faint breeze rippled lightly over the grasses and disappeared. A hare bounded past, almost breaking the delicate stalk of the sunflower. In the hush of the dawn a cold dew-drop fell on the feeble, whitish stalk and settled between its first two tiny leaves. . . .

At sunrise when the flock approached the gully Donka ran over to the little mound. He saw the shoot and let out a yell, waving his staff wildly.

"It's up! It's up!"

The Old Man heard Donka's shout but he did not answer. Nor did he quicken his step. He plodded on slowly, even more slowly perhaps than usual. But his eyes gave him away: they were warm and shining and moist, and he deliberately slowed his pace so that the young shepherds might not see him thus.

"Go," Badma urged him. "Your sunflower has come up."

"I saw it first!" cried Donka, beating his chest in his excitement. "I ran over and there it was sticking up out of the ground!"

The Old Man dropped on to his heels and ran a finger lightly over the delicate shoot.

"So, you're alive," he said.

Gently he plucked out the new shoots of feather-grass that had come up around the sunflower, loosened the earth with his knife and smoothed it out. Then he took his cloth-covered drinking flask from his belt.

"Here, drink a little water," he said. "You can't live without water."

Badma began to build a bonfire, glancing now and again at the Old Man.

"What shall we cook?" he asked. "I have some dry goat's cheese, and a bit of flour. Let's milk the sheep and cook some *budan*."

"Never mind your *budan*," said Donka, "Ulya promised to bring up some *borshch*."

Ulya was the cook, a grey-eyed lass with a plait of thick shining hair, who brought warm food to the shepherds every day. She was a gay lively girl and the shepherds treated her like a daughter. But the Old Man and Badma, who had long been accustomed to cook their own meal, declined Ulya's services, preferring to take supplies with them and prepare the food they were accustomed to—*budan*, *shulyun*, or *jamagul*—stewed mutton with wild onions.

For some time, however, Donka had ceased to share the old shepherds' meals. He insisted that he preferred *borshch*, although when Ulya arrived and poured her thick steaming soup into his bowl he hardly touched it.

That day Donka ran to meet Ulya as soon as the sorrels harnessed to the two-wheeled cart came into sight. Greeting her shyly, he fell into step beside the cart and announced:

"I've got some news for you."

Ulya sat with her bare white legs dangling from the cart, holding down the aluminium thermos flask in its warm nest of hay.

"What news?" she asked, adjusting her kerchief.

"That sunflower the Old Man planted came up today," said Donka. "I saw it first, at sunrise. I ran over to have a look and there it was sticking up out of the ground, this high."

"What've you got to do with it?" Ulya sniffed.

"Me?" Donka sounded hurt. "Why I. . . . Just let anyone try to touch it now and you'll see. . . ."

The girl threw him a scornful glance.

"Oh, sure, when it comes to fist-fighting you're a hero. We all know that."

Donka's marked partiality for her *borshch* had not escaped Ulya's notice, but even that did not soften her towards him after she had learned from his own

lips that he had spent a year in jail for a fight over some girl. And so she repulsed all the love-sick lad's timid advances by hard words, mockery or silence.

But now when Donka led the way to the little patch of earth and showed her the tiny green shoot of the sunflower, she gasped and caught him by the elbow.

"Well, look at that! It's come up, bless its heart! Look, it's still white at the bottom and the leaves are already green! But it's sure to die in this salty ground."

"We won't let it die," Donka whispered fiercely, squeezing Ulya's hand. "We'll look after it like a little baby."

Ulya, suddenly conscious of Donka's hand, frowned.

"Go and eat your *borsch*," she said sternly, and knotting her kerchief which had slipped off her head, she said in a mocking tone:

"Like a little baby! Some nurse you'd make. . . ."

The news that the Old Man's sunflower had come up spread quickly over the steppes, and the shepherds drove their flocks over in the direction of the gully daily to gaze on this wonder of wonders, and again the grass around the little mound flattened out. Many of the shepherds had begun to believe that the sunflower would survive after all.

But not Uncle Foka.

"It'll never grow," he declared in his usual sour fashion. "No sunflower ever grew in these steppes and never will."

"But it has come up," someone timidly tried to point out. But Uncle Foka, pulling angrily at his little black beard, said:

"What of it! The moisture underground will turn bitter from the salt, the hot winds will come and shrivel it up. Mark my words, by the time the spring's over it'll be dead."

The brief spring of the arid steppe belt was just reaching its height. The wind sent waves surging over the vast grey-green sea of tall grasses reaching out to the horizon. Amidst the dull silver hues of the feather-grass there was the fresh green of the clumps of liquorice plant, and wild tulips made bright splashes of orange, pink and crimson all over the steppe. The pale yellow and lilac blossoms of the *kochetki* nodded beside the bitter-scented wormwood. Luxuriant growths of *kochia*, and *verbena* with their white and violet blossoms, and fragrant thyme filled the alkali hollows. And around the salt-marshes there were tangles of reddish-grey saltwort with their thick, fleshy, intertwining stalks.

In the hidden hollows of the plain, amid the black and white wormwood thickets, the steppe eagles and bustards, hawks and buzzards had already hatched out their young. Noisy starlings darted about over the flocks, boldly perching on the backs of the sheep, digging their beaks into the heavy coats of wool and whistling shrilly to one another.

The steppe antelopes, the pride and glory of the plains, with russet-brown coats and white underbellies, roamed about in small herds, eating their fill of the grass and growing fat. Now and again an old stag, the leader of a herd, would venture quite close to the sheep, lift up his proud head and stand for a long while, his bulging eyes alert, his nostrils quivering.

The sheep too had grown sturdy and fat. Bathed in the warm water of the steppe gullies, clean and neatly shorn, they grazed contentedly in the steppe, and to the eagles soaring up above they must have looked like fluffy white clouds floating over the boundless green expanse.

"Well, now it has come, the *honin-sara*, the Month of Sheep," Badma said to the Old Man. "Let us celebrate it according to our steppe custom."

"Very well, let us celebrate," the Old Man agreed.

"Shall we invite the herdsmen?"

"Of course."

"Where shall we celebrate?" Badma asked.

"Over by the three hollows."

Donka who had overheard the old shepherds talking about some mysterious celebration chimed in to suggest that they order some *borshch* for the occasion. Badma laughed.

"No, Donka lad," he said. "No *borshch* this time. But you may invite Ulya if you like. She won't be in the way."

"Of course she won't," Donka agreed eagerly.

On Sunday morning the Old Man led the flock over to the gully an hour earlier than usual. Badma selected a fat ram from the flock, hooked it by the legs, dragged it to him and caught it firmly between his knees. Donka barely had time to glimpse the flash of steel in Badma's bronzed hand before the sheep rolled on to the ground with its throat cut.

"Go and pick some verbena," Badma ordered him. "And see you pick those that are in bloom."

While Donka was looking for flowering verbena and Badma was skinning the carcass, the Old Man, squatting on his heels, examined the sunflower.

It was growing fast. Its straight stalk powdered with a light fuzz had stretched out until it was now on a level with the feather-grasses. Besides the first double leaves, four new heart-shaped leaves, all green and sturdy, had formed on the stalk.

"Well, how goes it?" the Old Man asked the flower. "Would you like a little water?"

Loosening the soil around the stem, he poured some water into the hole from his flask and covered it up again with dry soil.

Badma, shading his eyes with his hand, called to the Old Man:

"Is that Donka already? Good lad! See what a lot of verbena he's picked!"

Donka came up, flushed and perspiring, and tossed a sheaf of flowering verbena on to the grass.

"Ulya's coming. She's got some fellow with her," said Donka in a low voice, trying vainly to hide his jealousy. "I think it's our zootechnician, but I couldn't tell from where I was. There was a camel cart behind them."

"That's from the third section," said Badma, peering into the distance.

The two carts were approaching. Sure enough, Ulya and the state farm zootechnician, a slim, blue-eyed youth in pince-nez, sat on the first one, and three old Kalmyk shepherds, in the second.

"I've come to see your plantation," said the zootechnician, greeting the Old Man and brushing the straw off his clothes. "Your sunflower is the talk of the whole farm."

The Old Man's face darkened.

"What is there to talk about? Idle tongues will wag."

"Idle?" echoed the zootechnician in surprise. "We haven't any idlers. They're all good workers and they know how important it is for your sunflower to thrive."

Badma came up to the zootechnician, rubbing his palms nervously.

"Comrade Party Organizer," he began. "It's *honin-sara*, you know. The shepherds want to celebrate it properly. They've brought their tent with them, and some *hara-arki* to drink just so everything will be right."

"Are you going to pray to your Shakji-Muni too?" asked the zootechnician with a smile.

"Oh no," replied Badma with an offended air. "We won't do any praying, but we want to thank the Sun for his kindness and we'll drink a glass of *hara-arki* to the health of the shepherds and the sheep."

"Not a bad idea," said the zootechnician.

While the old Kalmyks quickly set up the frame for their tent and stretched the grey felt covering over the poles, the zootechnician observed thoughtfully to the Old Man:

"You did well to plant the sunflower. It's high time this dead steppe was brought to life. It is good that the flower has come up. But that is not all. There is the summer drought to think of. Around the middle or the end of June the hot winds will begin to blow and everything on the plains will be burnt up."

"I shall water it regularly," said the Old Man gloomily.

The zootechnician searched the face of the old shepherd.

"You can water it of course. But the soil here is terribly saline. I shall have to ask some of the agronomists what can be done to help you. I don't know much about it myself, I'm only a zootechnician, you know."

"The shepherds are coming this way with their flocks!" cried Donka.

Three flocks approached the edge of the gully. The shepherds and their helpers watered the animals and rounded them up, using the dogs to keep the flocks apart.

"Greetings!" said Uncle Foka, removing his shabby cap. "Are you receiving guests?"

Badma spread out his hands and bowed.

"Greetings, friends! Our tent awaits you."

*Honin-sara*, the feast of the Sheep Month had begun. Inside the tent the mutton stew was already boiling in a cauldron which stood on an iron tripod over a smouldering fire of dried dung laid over with fresh thyme. A faintly acrid smoke hovered in the air. Bunches of flowering verbena had been thrust behind the slender poles that supported the tent and the floor was strewn with freshly-picked wormwood.

Hosts and guests seated themselves around the cauldron, their legs folded under them. An old, feeble Kalmyk stuck his knife into a chunk of the hot

mutton, went out of the tent and, holding the knife with the meat on it in the crook of his arm as if it were a babe, turned to face the sun and began to murmur some incantation.

"What is he saying?" the zootechnician asked.

"He is thanking the sky for having given us the sun," Badma explained in a low tone so that the old Kalmyk could not hear. "He is thanking the sun for having made the grass grow. And he is thanking the grasses for feeding the sheep and the horses, the oxen and the camels. . . ."

To the Old Man, sitting in the opening of the tent, the steppe spreading before him bathed in the light of the midday sun was full of a mysterious beauty. The tall juicy grasses glistening like silver in the sunlight swayed faintly, the gay flowers nodded, the air was filled with the twittering and the singing of the birds. Myraids of grasshoppers chirred in a thousand different keys. High up in the sky, its huge wings etched sharply against the blue, hovered a reddish-brown eagle. On the faraway horizon, where the blue sky seemed to merge with the earth, behind the shimmering curtain of haze at the very edge of the steppes he saw broad shining rivers and lakes and cool streams sparkling in the sun.

The Old Man knew that this was a mirage, that there were no rivers or lakes in the plains, yet the phantom visions beckoned to him from the shining distance, and the Old Man actually felt the cool fragrance of those rivers and lakes wafted to him across the steppes.

The feeble old Kalmyk too feasted his gaze on the radiant blue vision. Perhaps he was remembering his youth, or perhaps his undying love for his native land stirred his soul, for he stood as if spellbound, his body bent slightly forward, his half-closed eyes brimming with tears, and his trembling lips moving in some unknown chant:

"Om-ma-hom-tsok. . . ."

"What is he saying?" the zootechnician whispered to Badma.

"I do not know," replied Badma, his head drooping. "These are ancient words that were spoken by our ancestors. Perhaps he is begging the sun and the steppe to be merciful. . . ."

At last the long chant of the old Kalmyk ended. He re-entered the tent, looking radiant and years younger and seated himself in the place of honour. The feasting began. Soon the whole tent was filled with tobacco smoke.

As usual it was Uncle Foka who started the argument. Wiping his perspiring chest with a towel, he glanced defiantly at the Old Man and said in an angry tone:

"It's all right for them to plough up virgin soil in the Altai and Kazakhstan, but our business is raising sheep. If we start ploughing up the steppe we'll have neither sheep nor grain."

"Why?" Donka wanted to know.

"Because the soil here is no good. Nothing grows here except the grasses the sheep eat." Foka looked at the Old Man again. "If we plough up the steppe all our sheep will perish and the sunflowers will burn up."

"Maybe they won't," cried Donka.

Uncle Foka's thin lips twisted in a scornful smile.

"Maybe not, if we water each one separately with fresh water from our drinking flasks."

Turning to the zootechnician for support, he said:

"If you ask me, it's not right to water anything. Let the sunflower grow without water like all the other steppe plants."

"But suppose water comes to the steppe?" the zootechnician said.

"Water? Where from? Is the holy spirit going to send it or what?"

The zootechnician wiped his pince-nez with his handkerchief.

"Not the holy spirit, but men. Our steppe is very big, there's room for everything here. We need sheep, and we won't let anything hurt them, but we need grain too, and sunflowers, and orchards."

He opened his cigarette case, rolled a cigarette between his fingers and lit it.

"I've heard that the project to irrigate our plains is already beginning to be carried out. Vast numbers of machines have been acquired for the purpose. And you know what our people are like—once they get some idea into their heads they're sure to carry it out."

"So don't lose heart, dad," he wound up turning to the Old Man. "Take good care of your sunflower. Let it be the first to grow in the steppes, a stake in the future."

"Good for him!" Donka whispered approvingly to Ulya. "Come along and have a look at it. It's taller than the feather-grass already."

For Donka, whose heart ached with unrequited love, it was far more important to talk to Ulya than to listen to arguments about plants, that was why he was so eager to make her go with him to look at the sunflower.

He gallantly spread his jacket on the ground for her to sit on and began to give her a detailed account of how the Old Man has planted the seed, and how he, Donka, had marked the growth of the flower by putting notches in a strick, and how all the other shepherds made fun of them.

But he soon dropped the subject, fearing to bore his companion and to miss this long-sought opportunity to unburden his heart. After a brief pause he blurted out:

"Look here, Ulya, you can't do this to me. I love you, I can't live without you. Just say one word, that's all I want."

Ulya moved slightly away from him.

"What about that other girl?" she asked in a mocking tone.

"What girl?"

"The one you knifed that fellow for."

Donka hung his head.

"That was just foolishness, Ulya," he said in a tone of despair. "I never loved her, honest I didn't, and she didn't care anything for me either. I was just angry, that's all."

Ulya, moving still farther away from him, got up and shook out her kerchief.

"No, Donka, I don't want a fellow who attacks folk with knives. You'll have to look for someone else."

She turned on her heel and walked off without looking back. . . .

It is hard to say what Donka would have done had the Old Man not come out of the tent at that moment and said:

"We're celebrating the Month of the Sheep and the poor sheep are standing there waiting for their food. Raise the flocks!"

Donka thrust two fingers into his mouth and with one piercing whistle got the sheep on the move, called to the dogs, and hurried off after them. When he finally looked back, the cart carrying Ulya and the zootechnician was barely visible. Even the tent had already been removed.

Donka added fifteen more notches to his stick after that day. Every morning, heavy-hearted and gloomy, he went off by himself to the gully to measure the height of the sunflower, and each day he reported to the Old Man: "It's a little higher," or "It's grown by a centimetre."

The sunflower had indeed grown quite tall. It had long since left the tallest grasses far behind. Its heart-shaped leaves had spread out and at its tip had appeared a tight green head like a clenched fist. The sunflower was now visible from quite a distance.

"I'm sure it'll be a good centimetre higher tomorrow," Donka said to the Old Man.

"You won't have time to measure it tomorrow, lad," the Old Man said with a worried air.

"Why not?"

"There's going to be a storm, we'll have to take the sheep to the shelter."

"But how can you tell?"

"Just take a good look at the steppe, lad, and you will see for yourself," the Old Man replied. "Last night the stars were out and the scent of the grasses was very strong. But by dawn there was no dew and the smoke of our bonfire lay low over the ground. Now look at the clouds, they are moving against the wind, and each one of them looks like a cow's udders. All those are sure signs a storm is brewing."

The Old Man was not mistaken. After a dark sultry night flashes of lightning lit up the sky in the west and the low rumble of distant thunder was heard. From time to time gusts of wind rose rustling the grasses, but soon the wind disappeared and a heavy ominous silence hung over the steppe.

Dawn found the Old Man's flock near the portable shelter that had been set up half way between the camp and the gully. It was a low, cross-shaped shelter of reed panels attached to poles.

The sheep, sensing the approaching storm, cropped the grass nervously, pricking up their ears at the sound of the thunder, while the frightened lambs scampered hither and thither, bleating wildly and drawing the ewes after them. The shepherds and the dogs barely managed to keep the flock together.

Suddenly a jagged streak of lightning pierced the sky overhead with a blind-flash, followed by an ear-splitting peal of thunder.

"Drive them to the shelter!" cried the Old Man.

The sheep stampeded in a panic, but the dogs, barking loudly, turned them back and drove them towards the shelter. Ragged black clouds scudded across the low sky lit up by frequent flashes of lightning. The thunder growled incessantly. And now the first drops of a heavy downpour fell upon the earth.

The shepherds drove the sheep into the shelter and left the dogs to watch them. The dripping animals whined and cowered under the driving rain.

Drawing up the hoods of their heavy capes, the shepherds sat down under the shelter. The damp reed roof smelt vaguely of some unknown river.

The Old Man, scanning the stormy sky, saw a heavy whitish cloud moving slowly from the north towards the black thunder-heads. It's going to hail, he thought in alarm. And instantly he thought of the lone sunflower growing at the edge of the gully.

He got up and shaking the water off his cloak hurried off, calling over his shoulder as he went: "Look after the flock!"

Donka glanced in surprise at Badma. "What's the matter with him? Where has he gone?"

Badma's black eyes flashed under the hood: "Don't you know where he's gone? Stay where you are! Let him go if he likes. . . ."

The Old Man ran slowly to save his strength, leaning slightly forward and swinging his arms. It was not raining very heavily but the lurid hail-cloud crawled nearer and nearer. The hail will kill it, the Old Man thought anxiously. It will beat off all the leaves and break the stem too.

A frightened bustard flew up out of the grass flapping its rain-soaked wings clumsily. A brown steppe fox streaked past the Old Man, its short fluffy tail flying and its ears cocked. After it raced a family of antelopes, the stag, the hornless doe and their calf. For an instant the lightning illumined the steppe with its blinding light, then again everything was plunged into grey gloom.

The Old Man ran on blind to all about him. The rain streamed down his hot face, washing off the sweat. His torn boots made a squelching noise as he ran and his soaking trousers clung to his legs.

The Old Man saw the sunflower in a flash of lightning and he reached it just as the hail began to pelt the grasses.

"Hold on, my pretty!" cried the Old Man. "I'm coming!"

He opened his cape and spread it around the plant. The heavy hailstones pattered loudly against the wet cape and bounced off on to the ground where they bubbled and seethed in the puddles that formed in the alkali hollows. The bristly head of the sunflower was pressed against the bristly unshaven chin of the Old Man. He stood with his arms slightly spread and his head bent, afraid to move lest he break the tight little head of the sunflower by some awkward movement. A faint honey-like scent rose from the flower.

As he stood there waiting for the hail to cease, the Old Man thought of his long, hard life in this cruel steppe, remembered the misfortunes it had been his lot to suffer, and among them the last, the cruellest blow of all, one that had

made an old man of him overnight—the loss of his only son. He tried to imagine the common grave in which his beloved son lay buried far away in the Seelow Hills, and through the slanting curtain of hail, through the bright blue patches in the clouds, he saw those distant hills covered with white snow, lit up by the cold quiet radiance of eternal slumber.

The Old Man remembered how a soldier, who had come from the front, told him that the Seelow Hills weren't really hills at all, they weren't high enough to be called hills. He was talking nonsense, of course, the Old Man thought without rancour. If people call them hills they must be high. . . .

Presently the hail stopped. The black clouds sped away to the east. The sun shone out again over the freshly-washed steppe causing the myriads of rain-drops to sparkle like jewels. The Old Man stepped away from the sunflower, shook off his cape and turned to go, though the desire to linger was very strong. But he had to go.

"Well, good-bye!" he said, and tossing his heavy cape over his shoulder he walked off over the wet feather-grass.

The steppe was reviving after the rain. Countless skylarks sang in the heavens and the air was fragrant with the pungent scent of the grasses. Far away in the east low growls of the receding thunder could be heard.

But the steppe was not destined to rejoice long, and the people knew it. Day and night the vast plains hummed with activity. The air was filled with the incessant whirr of self-propelled reapers and the hum of tractors, and hay-stacking machines crawled in all directions. At night the darkness was pierced by searchlight beams and tractor headlights, and bonfires glowed in the distance. The state farm was hurrying to finish the haymaking before the heat set in.

Within a week giant hayricks were scattered all over the steppe. Atop some of the ricks eagles perched motionless as if carved from stone, watching for their prey.

And then came that which visits the steppe with inexorable regularity from year to year—the drought.

The sky was the first to change. Though as cloudless and clear as before, its deep blue seemed to fade. Then gradually the pallor assumed a strange, greenish-yellow hue.

The sun poured down pitilessly. No sooner had it risen above the horizon than its fiery breath fanned the earth, and by midday the steppe was as hot as an oven. Every blade of grass drooped from the heat. Animals clawed desperately at the dry, parched earth and rolled over on to their sides, panting heavily. Bustards, wings listlessly spread out and beaks dropped open, sprawled on the soft mole-hills.

The earth dried up, and the meagre reserve of moisture in it sank deeper and deeper. The roots of the grasses reached down after it, but the moisture receded too rapidly for the feeble roots. The grasses began to fade and wither, and the whole steppe seemed to turn drab and desolate.

Now and again a gusty wind swept the plains for a brief spell. It flitted over the flats and stirred the fading grasses, and the grasses responded with a harsh, metallic rustle. Then the wind would subside and heavy silence would descend once more.

But one day, just before dawn, a dry wind came up from the east. It neither rose nor fell but blew steadily from morning till night with a sinister monotony. It was a hot, suffocating wind that brought no coolness, no relief with it. On the fourth day the wind grew stronger and began to carry before it a few grains of sand and a fine dust.

It was just at this time that the sunflower in the gully burst into flower. It bloomed in spite of everything as if all that was happening in the steppe—the fiery dry wind, the untimely withering of the grasses, the deadly unslaked thirst of the parched earth—did not concern it in the least.

It could be seen from afar standing alone among the grey feather-grass and wormwood growing at its feet, its bright head turned defiantly towards the blazing sun.

The Old Man and his shepherds spent all their time beside the gully now. They pastured their sheep at night when the air cooled for a short while, and at sunrise drove the sheep over to the gully beside the water and kept them there until evening when the worst of the day's heat was over.

The water in the gully was drying up. The Old Man and Badma inspected the entire length of the gully and decided to dig a deep pit to preserve a supply of water for the sheep.

"Run over to the camp," the Old Man said to Donka, "and tell them to send someone to the main office for spades, axes and about ten good-sized logs."

Donka, who had not seen Ulya for some time, sprang up eagerly and reached for his boots.

"Maybe the director would give us a bulldozer?"

The Old Man frowned.

"No. They need the bulldozer for the canal that's being dug at the main section. We'll manage to dig a pit without a bulldozer."

"You tell Uncle Foka and the other shepherds to come and help," Badma put in. "Their sheep will need the water too."

The following morning Ulya and Donka brought all that the Old Man had ordered. After them came Uncle Foka with his flock. Winking at Badma and nodding in the direction of the sunflower, he said with a smirk:

"It's blooming, the silly thing. Doesn't know its end is near."

The Old Man took a spade off the cart.

"Enough talking. Let's get started."

It was hard work. All the shepherds except the Old Man took off their shirts and boots and rolled up their trousers.

While the men were digging, Ulya cooked dinner. But the heat gave them little appetite. Donka alone ate with gusto and praised the thin, over-salted concoction.

After dinner Ulya drove off and the digging was resumed. The sun poured down relentlessly, the sweat ran into the men's eyes and streamed down their bare backs.

"Some work, damn it to hell," gasped the spare-ribbed Uncle Foka, spitting in disgust. "And the worst of it is, it's all for nothing. The water won't stay in the pit."

"We must dig down to the clay," said the Old Man.

"We might have to dig down a hundred metres before we get to your damn clay."

"It can't be helped."

After three days the pit was ready. Then they dug a ditch to let the water in.

"Water's as salty as Ulya's soup," remarked Uncle Foka not without malice. "And it'll be a lot worse after it's stood for a month."

Donka dipped his cannister into the water, tasted it and made a wry face.

"It's no wonder. In this heat the salt comes right through the ground. Look how white the hollows are."

"Here, let me taste it," Badma said.

He took the cannister and drank a deep draught of the water, sighed with satisfaction and said in a thoughtful tone:

"It may seem salty to them that's not used to it. You have to get used to water. In the taiga there was a lake that had water as sweet and pure as a dew-drop. But we drank it and longed for our salty steppe water. It wasn't hot in those forests and there weren't any dry, scorching winds there either. But I used to dream of this cruel sweltering steppe of ours every night."

The steppe was burning up before their eyes. Where yesterday the grass had still been green, today everything was yellow and faded. The parched earth, hard as stone, began to crack. Deep fissures formed and swallowed up what little moisture still remained.

The wind blew harder, raising the clouds of fine dust higher and higher, and the sky became as lifeless and drab as the earth.

"We will have to wean the lambs," the Old Man decided. "The ewes are losing weight."

"Isn't it a bit too soon?" Badma asked doubtfully.

"We could wait another week if it wasn't for this drought."

Early in the morning an old herdsman with two girl helpers came for the lambs. They were jolly, sunburned lasses who laughed and joked a great deal, and Donka, heaving a mock sigh, remarked to the old herdsman:

"Be a sport, grandpa, and leave us one of those beauties of yours."

One of the girls, a buxom lass with a freckled face, nudged her dark-haired friend: "Isn't he the limit, eh? Forgotten all about his Ulya already."

Donka reddened.

"Forgotten who?"

"Eh, lad, you think we don't know?" the first girl laughed.

The dark-haired one laughed too.

"Where's your sunflower?" she said. "Ulya says you have a sunflower here. Says it's grown so tall you can see it all over the steppe."

"I'll show it to you later, when we drive the flock to the gully," Donka promised.

At the gully the girls admired the sunflower and then with the help of Badma and Donka they began to round up the lambs.

The Old Man leaning on his staff watched the proceedings. He had been tending sheep for more than half a century and every year the lambs were weaned and the old toothless ewes were removed from the flock. The ewes never returned—they were driven straight to the slaughterhouse. The lambs grew up and were distributed among the various flocks. Two or three years later an occasional sheep would turn up in its native flock. The Old Man always recognized it instantly, even before he had seen the brand on its ear.

Every year at weaning time the Old Man became more than usually gloomy and irritable. He did not believe that anyone could look after the sheep as he did, he distrusted all the herdsman and was especially hard on those who came to take his lambs away.

Now too, on learning that the grey-haired old herdsman was a newcomer to the steppes and had been a collective-farm cowherd before, the Old Man called him over and said:

"See here, cowman, you see those lambs are driven as far as possible from here without stopping, so they won't upset the ewes with their bleating. And make sure those giddy wenches of yours take proper care of the lambs instead of cackling so much."

"Now, you've no call to talk that way about my girls," said the old herdsman huffily. "They'll take good care of your lambs, don't worry. Though how anything can thrive in this fiery oven of a steppe of yours beats me."

"All right, you'd better get started."

The old herdsman tossed his knapsack over his shoulder, called to the girls and walked over to the lambs. Surrounded by the shepherds and the dogs, the lambs bleated loudly and scattered in a panic, but the shaggy dogs, obedient to the herdsman's whistle, caught up with them and turned them back.

The Old Man stood for a long time watching the lambs go, listening to their piteous cries and keeping an eye on the herdsman who were having difficulty holding back the alarmed ewes.

"There, Serko," the Old Man said to the wolf-hound lying at his feet, "our lambs are gone, and it'll be a long time before we see them again."

The dog turned his glowing brown eyes towards his master and wagged his tail.

"Ah, you're glad because you'll have less work, you lazy rascal," the Old Man chided him. "Come along, we'd better water the sunflower."

The sunflower looked much as usual. Its bright yellow petals fluttered around the heavy centre that was now slightly bent under its own weight;

the tiny furred yellow blossoms in the centre were as thick as a honeycomb, and the huge green leaves flapped and swayed in the wind.

Three more days went by. The wind blew with unabated ferocity and the dust hung in the air like a grey mist. You could look at the sun without blinking; even at midday it was no more than a blurred crimson patch in the sky.

One windy morning at dawn the Old Man's and Uncle Foka's flocks met in the steppe. Holding his cape under his chin and turning his back to the wind, Uncle Foka shouted to the Old Man:

"You'd better hurry over to the gully, the water has dropped in the pit and it's as salty as brine. If any of the other shepherds get there before you there won't be any water left for your sheep!"

He came closer and lit a cigarette, shielding the match with the skirt of his cape.

"Curse this wind! Fairly knocks you off your feet. Can't catch your breath and your mouth's full of grit."

He looked hard at the Old Man, hesitated a moment, scratched his beard and said with affectionate irony:

"That poor little sunflower of yours . . . it's in a bad way, I'm afraid. . . ."

The Old Man's face darkened. "Rubbish!" he said gruffly.

"I've just come from there," Uncle Foka cried. "I saw it with my own eyes. The leaves are hanging like rags, and the ends are turning yellow."

Before Uncle Foka had finished speaking the Old Man cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted to his shepherds:

"Turn the flock towards the gully!"

From a distance the sunflower looked as sturdy and fresh as ever. But when he came nearer the Old Man saw that its broad leaves were drooping on their stalk and some of them were curling at the edges.

"What's the matter, little one?" the Old Man asked softly, gingerly touching one of the faded leaves. "What is it?"

The leaves whispered drily in reply.

"If only you could tell me what you want," the Old Man said sadly. "But you can't. You can only stand there and wither. . . ."

Badma laid his hand lightly on the Old Man's bowed back.

"Donka's gone off to the camp to get the zootechnician. Hear me? Donka's as swift as a hawk. He'll be there and back in no time."

In the meantime Donka with the gale at his back was running for all he was worth across the steppe, panting and gasping for breath. His torn slippers had dropped off his feet and he ran barefoot leaping up now and again when the dry prickly weeds pierced his feet. As he ran he cursed the Old Man to himself. Why had he started all this? Like a fool, Donka had believed in his experiment, and now it had failed. Uncle Foka and the others had been right after all.

But even as he cursed him, Donka's heart ached with love and tenderness for the gallant old shepherd and his indomitable spirit, and suddenly a new

confidence, a new faith in the Old Man and his "miracle" was born in him. That miracle would come to pass, he told himself, the Old Man's sunflower would survive in spite of everything. Donka's heart sang with this faith that seemed to lift him high up above the burning steppe and the swirling dust and impel him onward.

"Who said it won't work!" he shouted, panting like a hard-ridden horse. "You wait, you scoffers, we'll show you!"

Before long Donka, with the zootechnician beside him, was driving the cart at breakneck speed back across the steppe.

They found the Old Man beside the sunflower watching Badma rubbing horse manure into the dry soil.

"Wait a moment," said the zootechnician. "I consulted an agronomist. He says you can counteract the alkali in the soil by using gypsum. He gave me some crushed gypsum and a bottle of fertilizer. Try it. He said it might help your sunflower to survive."

"We'll try anything," the Old Man said.

They worked for a long time beside the sunflower. The sand gritted in their teeth, and the dust made their eyes smart. The raging wind swept up more and more yellow dust, lifting it higher and higher towards the murky yellow sky.

"The *guzir-hur* the dust-rain, is coming," Badma predicted gloomily, scanning the lowering sky. "The whole steppe will be covered with powdery dust."

At that moment the zootechnician who had been working the fertilized soil into the root of the sunflower, turned sharply exposing his face to the wind. In an instant his pince-nez was torn from his nose and sent crashing against the spade, scattering tiny slivers of glass in all directions.

Badma rushed to pick them up.

"That damned wind. See what it has done!"

"Don't bother, don't bother," said the zootechnician, rubbing his watering eyes with his fist. "And don't worry about the *guzir-hur* either. We'll soon have water here in the steppes. It is coming nearer and nearer every day. I heard over the radio that hundreds of men and machines are working already."

"But when will it come?" Donka said wistfully.

"It won't be long now," said the zootechnician. "You'll see. We shall have ponds and new wells and good watering pools, everything."

He stretched out his hand to the Old Man.

"Good-bye. I hope your sunflower thrives."

For a few days no change was visible in the sunflower, except that the dry dead leaves dropped off. All the shepherds from far and near enquired after it, offered all kinds of advice and marvelled at the stubborn persistence of the Old Man.

Uncle Foka alone remained unconvinced.

"Trying to go against Nature," he muttered. "Think they can outwit the steppe. I looked at that sunflower of theirs the other day—it was all shrivelled

and dark like a sick lamb. Mark my words, it'll be dead before the week is out. . . ."

But the sunflower did not die. Having shed half of its leaves, it grew stronger and not one of its yellow petals had withered. Its tightly packed head which had been bent earthwards was now upraised as if it had awakened after a long, heavy sleep and was surveying the grey, cheerless steppe.

The wind was gradually dying down. Now and again it blew in fitful gusts for a short time, raising clouds of dust, swirling them around, chasing them westward, then subsiding suddenly and vanishing among the dry grasses.

When the wind abated the *guzir-hur* began. The dust which the wind had swept up into the sky began slowly to settle. For several days it came down, slowly, almost imperceptibly, dropping softly and evenly on to the ground until the whole steppe was covered with a dingy grey blanket. And when the sun at last lit up the boundless flat expanses a desolate and seemingly lifeless wilderness revealed itself to men's eyes.

The gully where the Old Man and the other shepherds had watered the sheep had long since dried up. Not a drop of water was left in the pit the shepherds had dug. They now stopped with their flocks in the flats farther on where there was a deep well and long drinking troughs.

Although the new sheep paths now lay a good distance away from the place where the sunflower grew, the Old Man often went to see it and spent many hours beside it.

Sometimes Donka and Ulya came too. Their concern for the sunflower and their desire to help the Old Man had brought them together and touched those hidden springs of feeling that draw people to one another.

"You know, Donka," Ulya said to him one day. "I believe you're a good sort after all. I do want you to be good."

One early September morning Donka went alone to the gully. Instead of going the usual way he took the path along the gully in the hope of coming across an antelope. He reached the gully before he was aware of it and when he walked up the side of the familiar rise he stopped in his tracks.

Uncle Foka was crouching beside the sunflower, with his back to Donka. His hands were busy and he seemed to be fingering every leaf. As Donka watched, he stood up and poked a finger into the centre of the flower and examined it closely as if he were counting the seeds.

"Hey, what're you doing here, you wrecker!" yelled Donka.

Uncle Foka started and swung round. A pumpkin gourd fell from his hands, splashing water on to the ground. Uncle Foka's little beard quivered, and his eyes bulged with fright and confusion.

"No, no, Donka," he babbled. "I'm not a wrecker. Not me. It's true I didn't believe the Old Man could do it. But I see I was wrong . . . I . . . I thought I'd wash the leaves a bit, and count the seeds just to see if the birds had been at it."

Donka's round-eyed gaze shifted from Uncle Foka to the sunflower. Sure enough, every leaf had been washed. Drops of water were trickling down the stalk and the whole flower glowed and sparkled under the rays of the morning sun.

Uncle Foka picked up the empty gourd and sighed.

"I'll be going then," he said. "You can tell the Old Man I believe it now . . . ."

Autumn began, the cool, cloudy days of the *hulugun*, the Mice Month, as Badma called it. The first rain came, a quiet, gentle rain that washed the dust off the dead leaves in the steppe and formed little puddles on the sheep paths. Then the cold crept up stealthily from the north. In the mornings it decked every blade of grass with a delicate white coating and cast its chill melancholy over the whole steppe.

One after another the restless tumbleweed began to break away from their roots. At sunrise they would stir, tossing from side to side as if reluctant to leave their native haunts, and then, caught up by the wind, they would set out on their mysterious journey across to steppes.

A hush settled over the sombre-hued plains. The field mice, deep down in their burrows, had settled down to sleep. The antelopes had gone in search of new grazing grounds.

Only the sunflower stood as before, proud and solitary, the only spot of colour in the steppe. Its stalk had hardened, the few remaining leaves had grown brittle, it had long since shed its petals, but it stood sturdy and straight.

One quiet autumn morning a stranger appeared on the sheep path — a young man with brown eyes and a slender, boyish neck, wearing an oil-stained padded jacket. He noticed the sunflower from a distance, paused for a moment and then went over to it. Taking a penknife from his pocket, he bent the head of the flower towards him, sliced it off the stalk and continued on his way, holding the sunflower head in his hand and popping the seeds into his mouth as he went.

He was thus engaged when he encountered the sheep flocks that were moving slowly in the direction of the hollows.

Donka was the first to realize what had happened. With a face contorted with rage he rushed towards the stranger, seized him by chest.

"You . . . swine, you . . ." he breathed hoarsely. "What've you done!"

Someone laid a heavy hand on Donka's shoulder. He released the stranger and turned. Beside him stood the Old Man. Badma, Ulya, Uncle Foka and the shepherds were running up from all sides.

"Wait, Donka," the Old Man said quietly.

Moving Donka aside, he picked up the sunflower which the stranger had dropped, and passed his hand slowly over the prickly honeycomb packed tightly with seeds.

"That's not the way, Donka," he said. "What did we grow it for if not for people? For you and for him, for all of us."

With a quick movement the Old Man broke a piece off the sunflower and handed it to the frightened stranger.

"Take it, son. We'll leave the rest for ourselves, for those who grew it. . . ."

Badma pressed the Old Man's hand.

"That's right," he said. "When *tsagan-sara*, the White Month of Spring, comes we'll plant its seeds in the ground. . . ."

The Old Man looked up at the bleak autumn sky.

"Yes, Badma, come the White Month of Spring we shall plant the seeds again."

And, leaning on his staff, he set off slowly at the head of his flock.

Overhead migrant swans, winging their way southward, were silhouetted against the dark sky. Their voices floated down to the men in the steppe like the faint peal of a distant bell, carrying with it the promise of another spring.

*Translated by Rose Prokofieva*

*Illustrated by Pyotr Pinkisevich*





# Perekop

25

The wind rustled in the bare branches of the Askania-Nova parks. An elderly man, wretchedly dressed, stood in a clearing staring at something at his feet. What was he examining so intently?

Only yesterday a tree had stood here, its branches rustling in the wind, and now there was just a stump, with its rings marking the years that had passed.

A group of horsemen came galloping in from the steppe, a red pennant fluttering high above them on a lance. They rode up and halted.

"Is this Askania-Nova?"

"It is."

"And who are you?"

"The gardener. Murashko. And you?"

The rider who had spoken to him introduced the party:

"We are Red Army men. This is Comrade Budyonny. This is Spitalny, my orderly, and I am Voroshilov."

The gardener's eyes remained still as sad and, noticing this, Voroshilov nodded at the freshly cut stump:

"So you grudge it?"

Murashko looked up straight into his eyes:

"Yes."

He had not yet told them how much labour it had cost him to rear this one oasis in the open steppe. They had not yet heard about the thousands of labourers who had dug the ponds here, planted these trees and watered them, shielding them with their own bodies from the blows of the black storms. Murashko would tell them about that later, but now the tone of his voice, the grief in his eyes was enough for them to realize how hurt and disappointed he was. The

tree had gone for firewood, for a campfire to warm some squadron passing in the night.

"Some of our people?" Voroshilov asked disapprovingly.

"That's just the trouble, that they were ours. There would be nothing to it if it had been the others — they don't care if the world comes to an end after them. But our fellows are the owners now, they ought to have thought what they were doing."

"The lads have got used to thinking of it as the landlord's," the orderly remarked. "They show no mercy."

"Well, they must get used to something else," Voroshilov glanced at him severely. "It's time we got used to the idea that this is our national inheritance." And he turned to Budyonny. "I think it would be a good idea if the First Mounted took care of this Tavrian oasis."

"I'm from the steppes myself," Budyonny nodded. "I know what it is to grow a tree in the steppe."

As they rode away, Voroshilov turned to Murashko and said encouragingly: "We'll give you a preservation order for Askania-Nova today. No one will touch a twig. Your parks will be rustling here for generations to come."

Urging their horses into a gallop, they rode off.

And from the steppe, from the direction of Kakhovka the scarlet pennants again appeared, fluttering high on lances as more and more cavalry forces rode past.

All over the Tavrian steppe in those days gleamed the sabres of the First Mounted. A battle was raging the like of which this region had never known before. The task was to cut off the White forces from the isthmuses, to surround and destroy them here, on the rolling lands of North Tavria. And to fulfil this task the divisions of the First Mounted were moving swiftly eastwards to strike at Novo-Alexeyevka and Genichesk.

Wrangel's striking force was at that time concentrated in the region of Serogoza—Agaiman. The appearance of the First Mounted in their rear came as a complete surprise to them, for among the White troops much credence had been given to the rumour that the First Mounted Army had been routed in the fighting against the White Poles and drowned in the marshes of Zamostye and Volyn. Then suddenly the news flashed through the troops:

"Budyonny's men are behind us!"

At first no one would believe it: "Where've they come from? The sky?"

"No, from Kakhovka!"

But the White command managed to avoid a panic. What was more, on learning that the First Mounted was moving further and further away from the Kakhovka bridgehead in its progress eastwards, Wrangel gave orders to capture Kakhovka, cut off the First Mounted and destroy it, making use of White superiority in armoured forces and aircraft, which the First Mounted did not possess at all.

The Red Army men had to fight under exceptionally difficult conditions. Powerful formations of Wrangel's cavalry with spearheads of armoured cars and



supporting aircraft were battering their way towards those narrow necks of land from the north with the fury and desperation of doomed men, striving in their advance to encircle Red cavalry divisions at all points. It was impossible to tell where they would strike, who would feel the weight of their armoured attack.

One of the bitterest actions the Red cavalry had to fight was in the village of Otrada, which had been taken over by the field headquarters of the First Mounted. Masses of enemy troops, supported by artillery and armoured cars, started encircling the village from the north. The units of the First Mounted stationed in the village were threatened with complete destruction. Fighting began in the streets of the village. Units of the Special Cavalry Brigade and the Revolutionary Military Committee's artillery battalion, which Voroshilov and Budyonny led personally into the attack, held up the advance of superior enemy forces till late in the evening. There was no mercy for anyone in this fighting. It seemed that their forces were equal, and that until everyone had been cut down there would be no end to the slaughter. They fought in the steppe, they fought in the village streets and for days on end they did not so much as unsaddle their horses or sheathe their sabres. The division commanders and commissars joined in the charges side by side with the rankers, ready to sacrifice their lives in order to prevent the enemy from reaching the isthmus.

Eventually the first stage in the struggle came to an end. The whole enormous territory of North Tavria which the enemy had seized in the course of the summer was after many days of fighting cleared of hostile forces; only a part of them succeeded in breaking through across the isthmuses and taking refuge

in the Crimea. In the course of these battles the enemy suffered enormous losses: nearly twenty thousand prisoners, over a hundred guns, nearly all the baggage trains and a huge quantity of ammunition—tens of thousands of shells and millions of cartridges. In the region of Genichesk and Salkoo advanced units of the First Mounted, having surrounded the enemy's rear services, also captured several officers of the American mission who had been with the Whites for the alleged purpose of "combating looting."

26

Soon after the White forces had retreated to the Crimea with the intention of wintering there, Wrangel went with representatives of the foreign military missions to inspect the fortifications of the Turkish Wall at Perekop.

The huge wall, erected in ancient times by slaves and mentioned even by Herodotus in his writings, was now reinforced throughout with concrete and steel, and the deep ditch before it, where ships had sailed in days gone by, was mined with high explosives and made impassable by thickets of barbed wire. The whole area in front of Perekop was covered with wire defences. Stretching for nearly eleven versts, the wall spanned the isthmus from sea to sea barring the northern gates into the Crimea.

For several hours the highly placed officers investigated the powerful fortifications, cautiously ducking their heads as they plunged along communication trenches, and inspected with meticulous care the numerous machine-gun nests, firing slits, dug-outs and gun placements.

The threatening muzzles of guns mounted on the wall itself pointed northwards, into the open Tavrian steppe, grey and unfriendly in the autumn weather. Barbed wire spread darkly over the whole isthmus, from the creeks of the Sivash to the Gulf of Perekop, gleaming like steel in the west, where the lines of fortifications vanished into the sea. In the steppe there was not a soul, only a wind-twisted sunflower stalk sticking up here and there. "They're our range-markers," the gunners explained. "We call them 'death marks.'"

During the inspection all gun-crews remained at action stations. And strange crews they were. The machine-guns were manned by cadets and sergeant-majors, while even veterans with colonel's shoulder-straps were to be seen as gun-layers on the heavy artillery. Morose, bearded, they stood at attention demonstrating physically that here they were not officers, but ordinary rank-and-filers. There was no need for an interpreter when it came to replying to questions, for nearly all of them spoke fluent English or French.

The guests were a strange collection too. Most of them did not feel themselves to be guests at all. They examined the defenders as if they were their own troops. Quite without ceremony they would brush aside the officer-rankers, put their eyes to the firing slits and check the range and the field of fire.

From time to time they would test the batteries, and then the heavy guns would crash out and a spout of grey-black dust, fire, and smoke would rise in the air far away in the steppe or on the Sivash.

They inspected everything with an air of ownership, and the proprietary note sounded even in their praises, in the brief remarks that the foreign guests addressed now to the gun-crews, now to Wrangel, now to the French engineers who had directed the building of all the fortifications.

"Here it is, gentlemen, our wall of death," Wrangel said, when the visitors, after going all over the defences and making themselves thoroughly cold, gathered at length in the command-post dug-out. "Now you can see for yourselves that the key to salvation from Bolshevism is not in Paris, not in London, not in New York, but here, where we are now, on this wall. This is where we intend spending the winter."

"One could spend a hundred winters under a roof like this, I should think!" Admiral McKelly exclaimed, looking up and complacently examining the steel girders of the roof. "You've got American steel defending you, the best steel in the world! I am willing to bet, gentlemen, that the fiercest Bolshevik armies won't be able to bite through that steel, in spite of their fanaticism."

"I consider that everything within human power has been done for the defence of the Crimea," said Wrangel, addressing the elderly grey-haired General Foque, who had been in charge of the fortification work, and he then thanked him on behalf of the White forces.

Cognac was brought in. Rubbing the circulation back into their hands, the foreign military representatives crowded round Colonel Walsh, head of the British mission, who had undertaken the job of uncorking the bottles.

When the glasses had been filled, Wrangel took the initiative.

"To American steel, the best in the world!" he said grimly, addressing McKelly, then glanced at the others: "Your health, gentlemen! To those whose tireless intelligence has been embodied in the impregnable strength of these fortifications: to Admiral Seymour, to General Case, to the Comte de Mertelle, and especially to you, my dear Foque! Russia will never forget what she owes her true allies."

They drank and the conversation revived.

"A second Verdun! These forts and blockhouses and the concrete dug-outs are splendid!"

"That impassable network of wire entanglements! And the mine-fields! The number of machine-guns they have on the wall! No, gentlemen, the Bolsheviks will never get across this line!"

Only the leader of the Japanese Military Mission Major Takakhasi took no part in the animated conversation. It was the first time he had visited the wall and now he was sitting hunched in a corner, making notes.

"And what is your opinion, Major?" General Foque asked, going over to the Japanese.

"What I have seen today is . . . colossal," Takakhasi replied, closing his notebook. "It is a veritable miracle of military science. Such a wall in an open plain, such a mass of fire-power, first-class fortifications. Not a single army in the world—even a Bolshevik army—could take it." He paused to think for a moment, then added: "At least, not by a frontal attack. . . ."

"And it can't be outflanked," Wrangel who had evidently been listening to their conversation, remarked. "Our fortifications on the Chongar Isthmus are as good as here, if not better. The only place the enemy might be able to break through into the Crimea is along the Arabat Bank. But, as you know, the Arabat Bank. . . ."

"Hello there, gentlemen!" McKelly called cheerfully from the table, interrupting Wrangel. "I drink to a new Verdun! I drink to our modern khan."

Wrangel started. The crude tactlessness of this bumptious American had touched him to the quick.

"As a matter of fact," the Admiral blundered on, "I still don't know who exactly they were, those khans."

"It was the title given to the local Crimean vassals of the Turkish sultans," Colonel Walsh explained, pouring himself a glass of cognac.

Wrangel could scarcely contain his fury. So, having taken up the position of the Crimean khans on the Turkish wall, he was to share their subservient role with them!

"But we are also confident about the Arabat Bank," Wrangel continued irritably, mainly addressing Takakhasi, who listened with evident interest. "Its whole length is reliably covered by naval guns from the sea."

"A mouse couldn't get across there," croaked Colonel Walsh, sipping his cognac and listening casually to the conversation. "The ships of the British Navy have strict orders about that. The Bank is under our protection."

"But what about the Sivash?" The Japanese raised his spectacles and looked enquiringly at the long-limbed Wrangel, then at McKelly.

McKelly smiled. How ill-informed this yellow *samurai* was!

"The Sivash approach is definitely excluded," said Wrangel with a careless sweep of his arm. "Only an army determined to commit suicide would attempt to cross those quagmires. . . ."

"But they say that the Sivash sometimes freezes over," the Japanese insisted.

"Once in a hundred years," Wrangel assured him. "Nature herself is on our side."

They left the dug-out and stared into the smooth blue-steel distances of the Sivash through their field-glasses. Here and there clumps of bullrushes and sandbanks could be seen. A sea! An impassable sea of decay. Limitless quagmires and marshes. . . . Beyond the waters of the Sivash one could just make out the wretched villages on the far shore, bathed in the cold evening sunlight. And beyond them a boundless horizon of steppe. It was like a firing range, flat, deserted, mysterious. . . .

"Prairies," said McKelly, handing his field-glasses to the Japanese. "You'd almost expect tribes of Redskins to come swarming across them."

Takakhasi kept the field-glasses to his eyes for a long time.

The sun was sinking, red and inflamed, into the steppe. The Japanese did not like that sun and the livid halo round it.

"We can expect a cyclone," he said, when it had sunk below the horizon.

"Wind! A Scythian wind!" Walsh said crossly, raising the collar of his great-coat. "Don't you think we've had enough for today, gentlemen?"

It was dusk when the inspecting party went back to their cars. They turned once again to survey the dark formidable wall stretching mysteriously across the whole isthmus. Fifteen metres thick, twenty metres high. Seventeen rows of barbed wire, countless machine-guns, field guns, mortars. . . . There were still one or two things to be done, of course, that branch line must be brought right up to the wall for one, but on the whole they were satisfied with their inspection.

Magnificent! Impregnable! . . .

A wall of death.

27

Of course, neither General Wrangel nor his distinguished foreign advisers would have been interested in what Ivan Ivanovich Olenchuk, an inhabitant of the village of Stroganovka, thought about the Sivash and the fortifications of the Turkish wall. Surely it would have been absurd for those acknowledged military experts to pay attention to the ideas or even the existence of this Olenchuk fellow.

But Olenchuk did exist. Perhaps he was not a strategist, but nevertheless he was an old soldier and an active member of the Stroganovka poor peasants' committee. He was the man who had given his son to the Red Army and who had been beaten up by the Whites for it, when they took Stroganovka.

All the summer Wrangel's men had been rounding up the Sivash peasants and sending them with their carts into the Crimea. Olenchuk had been sent there too. He had fed the fleas in the Tatar villages, had been harnessed to a plough during the construction of the railway from Yunun to Perekop, and meanwhile had had a look at the preparations that were being made on the isthmus. He had seen the huge guns mounted on the wall and the priests sprinkling them with holy water, he had seen the foreign visitors and the various military experts whirling to and fro through the dust in their shining motor-cars. Once near Armyansk a party of them had even stopped to take a photograph of Olenchuk in his rags, and had come over to have a look at his gnarled rawhide shepherd's sandals and even his horse's harness. It was so quaint.

"Try and say, 'I've expropriated the expropriators,'" they had urged him amid roars of laughter. "Go on! Don't be shy!"

But for the most part they drove past indifferently, for there were plenty of ragged labourers and sun-blackened cart-drivers like him about. They were looked upon as beasts of burden by the gentry at Perekop, who had even reached the point of harnessing them to the plough. But even with a yoke on their necks they managed to look up at the wall and take notice of what was being done there.

Everything at Perekop had been measured very carefully, the strategists and fortification experts had calculated everything down to the last detail. The only thing they had forgotten was that there was a man called Olenchuk in the

world, a peasant tanned and scorched by the Sivash winds, who had grown up on this soil, watered it with his sweat and felt himself to be its rightful owner. But the strategists should have taken him into consideration.

Soon after the Red forces took over Stroganovka, Olenchuk was summoned to headquarters.

Olenchuk had all kinds of guesses as he walked down the street behind the headquarters orderly. He did not yet know why he had been summoned to headquarters, but a premonition of something important and out of the ordinary was working within him and there was a stirring of joy in his heart. Perhaps he was going to meet his son? Some people he knew in Askania had said they had seen him go past with the Red cavalry.

"Tell Father I'm alive and on my way to Chongar," he had shouted.

The grim Sivash autumn was one of howling winds. They lashed cruelly across the steppe, and as they swooped over the low-lying Sivash, they drove the water further and further from the shore, laying bare the marshy flats. The sky was piled high with clouds, and underfoot the earth was firmly fettered by the early frost. Guns and baggage trains rumbled as if they were moving over concrete and the horses' hooves rang out clear and loud.

By now the village was full of troops. Shouting signallers were hurriedly pulling a line down to the Sivash. There was a babble of voices in every yard, and smoke was pouring from every chimney: in the cottages supper was being cooked for the troops. All the snug corners in Stroganovka were taken, a platoon to a hut, but still they came, fresh columns of infantry, frozen, crusted with ice, their banners unfurled.

Never before had Stroganovka known such a mass of troops. It gladdened Olenchuk's heart to see such strength. But what *did* they want him at headquarters for? He had tried asking the orderly, but the orderly turned out to be not one of the talkative kind.

"They'll tell you when you get there."

The sentries made way for Olenchuk and let him through without examination.

He stepped inside and said good evening.

"Good evening to you!"

In the twilight of the room he saw the figures of men in military uniform. There must be some sort of conference on. Some of them were sitting round a table, others were standing behind them, scanning a map spread out on the table. Evidently they hadn't been here long and had not had time to make themselves comfortable: there were not even enough nails in the wall for their greatcoats, which lay piled up on the window-sills.

As he crossed the threshold Olenchuk noticed that all eyes swivelled on to him at once, on his awkward figure in new sandals, sheepskin cap and leather jacket. There was a moment's silence.

"Come in," said a calm low-pitched voice. "Take a chair . . . ."

Olenchuk took off his cap and sat down on the chair by the table.

A lamp was brought in, a big one, with a well-polished glass. He could see

their intent, serious faces. Which of them was senior in rank? The thin-faced one, in spectacles, or that other one sitting opposite him, dark and broad in the forehead, with a fluffy fair moustache?

"Olenchuk... Ivan Ivanovich?" the man with the broad forehead and fair moustache was the first to speak.

"Yes."

"I am Frunze, Commander of the Southern Front."

"I've heard about you," said Olenchuk.

Frunze bent over the map.

"Tell me, Ivan Ivanovich, do you know the Sivash well?"

Olenchuk seemed to have been expecting this. Not a muscle moved on his broad, furrowed, deeply sunburnt face. Did he know the Sivash well? His whole life had been spent on the Sivash, he had been over every inch of that dead, rotten sea. As a boy he used to go with his friends over to the other side to rob the ducks' nests on the deserted cliffs of the Crimean coast, on what they used to call the "Turkish Battery." And later on, when he grew up, he had many a time walked across the Sivash to the fairs in the Crimea, and to look for work on the estates there. All his life he had collected salt. He had it in his bones, he had become steeped in brine, scratching at nights from the salt patches of the Sivash the miserable, grudging gifts of that rotten sea.

"I was born on the Sivash, and I reckon I'll die there too, Comrade Frunze."

"What's the Sivash like now? The water seems to be on the ebb?"

"It was full of water yesterday, but now there's a west wind blowing and it's drawing it off bit by bit. If it keeps ablowing all night, there'll be only mud left by morning."

"How wide do you consider the Sivash at this point?"

"I've never measured it and I don't want to tell you wrong. But I should think it'd be about ten versts."

Frunze spilled out a few matches on the table, bent over the map and began measuring.

"Eight as the crow flies."

Olenchuk didn't argue: if it was eight, it was eight.

Frunze tapped the map thoughtfully with his fingers.

"You know, Comrade Olenchuk, that the route over the Perekop Isthmus into the Crimea is closed to the Red Army." He glanced up at Olenchuk seriously and trustingly, as though he knew him to be a man quite capable of understanding his thoughts, and from whom he had nothing to hide. "We could send our troops through here," he pointed to the map. "along the Arabat Bank, as Field Marshal Lassi did once in 1732. That was a brilliant manoeuvre. Lassi took his troops along the Bank unnoticed, crossed on to the peninsular at the mouth of Salgir and came out in the rear of the Crimean khan, who had his main forces at Perekop. But for us even the Bank is closed. It's over a hundred versts long and its whole length is within range of the guns of the enemy's ships at sea. And so the only thing we have left," he added, still eyeing Olenchuk attentively, "you know what it is yourself."

Olenchuk nodded. Yes, he knew.

"We are interested in the fords across the Sivash. You know them better than anybody else, don't you?"

Olenchuk took his time over answering. He realized that very much depended on what he would say, what advice he would give. Who, better than he, Olenchuk, knew the secret paths across the Sivash, which no one had ever investigated, ever marked on a map. You had to grow up on the Sivash to be able to know by some sixth sense where they were on the darkest of nights as you roamed about with a bag of salt over your shoulder, among the bogs, among the islands of stunted rushes on the sandbanks, making your way step by step among the innumerable rotten pits, quagmires and treacherous black whirlpools. Olenchuk had made a stubborn life-long study of the ways of this amazing sea. Sometimes it delighted him with its salt stretching in a glistening expanse all the way to the horizon, as though covered in untrodden, virgin snow. And sometimes, in the heat of the day the Sivash villages would curse this endless marsh, breathing out the hot stench of dead seaweed rotting in the water, which the wind from the sea of Azov carried along their streets.

The Sivash sets a thousand traps and snares for a man, but the most dangerous of them all are the black rotting whirlpools, the so-called *chaklaks*. Hard to see among the rushes, they bubble ceaselessly, choking up subterranean water with a mixture of silt and sand from their mysterious depths, then sucking it back again into the soggy, rotting morass. Without experience you would never notice a *chaklak* at night. Woe betide him who dares to cross the Sivash without knowing the fords! Many a man has been sucked down into that foul clinging morass. And at this season the Sivash was even more dangerous. When the wind drew off the water and the surface of the marsh was touched by frost it looked as if you could cross it, but at the first step you would be sucked under. The *chaklaks* are bottomless, their jaws insatiable. They will swallow one man and they will swallow an army. Yes, Olenchuk had something to think about before he answered the commander's question.

"Or perhaps the Sivash is really impassable, as the White command believes?"

"That depends: for some it's impassable, but for some. . . ."

There was a clatter of hooves under the window. An orderly appeared and reported that Voroshilov and Budyonny had arrived. They came in and shook hands all round, then sat down at the table.

"The meeting continues," Frunze proclaimed with a touch of humour in his voice. "Here we have representatives of both infantry and cavalry. I have just been asking Comrade Olenchuk's advice about the Sivash fords."

"So there are some fords across it?" Voroshilov asked in a friendly tone.

"If you look for them, there are," Olenchuk replied.

"Could a horse get across?" asked Budyonny.

"I wouldn't say about a horse, but a man could."

Frunze and Voroshilov glanced at each other in silence.

The lean-faced man in spectacles drew his pencil slowly across the map.

"What a failure tsarism has been, couldn't even leave us a decent map of the Sivash!"

"You couldn't get it all in on a map, comrade," Olenchuk remarked. "There're too many pitfalls about there."

"Even the best map can't replace the practical experience of the people," Frunze said with conviction. "Comrade Olenchuk, we need people who know the Sivash to perfection and can find their way across it not only in daylight, but at night, in absolute darkness. In a word, we need guides. Who can you recommend?"

Olenchuk fell into deep thought. He had been a soldier himself and he knew what it meant to be a guide, what a responsibility it was to undertake. It was not just a case of leading across one man, or two, but of leading a whole army. The lives of so many men, of thousands upon thousands of sons of the Revolution would depend on the integrity of that guide. Realizing his dilemma, Frunze rose from the table.

"Those in the Crimea are being assisted by the bourgeoisie of the whole world," he said. "They have the best military experts working for them. They have embodied all the immense experience of the imperialist war in the fortification of Chongar and Perekop. Wrangel counts on them for everything. But our army, the army of workers and peasants, counts only on itself and on the support of the people. In the case under consideration the opinion, the intelligence and experience of an ordinary working man means very much to us, the experience of people like you, Olenchuk, salt-gatherers, labourers and shepherds. And that is why we are asking you for advice. Who could lead the way? Who can we entrust with the task of guiding our troops across to the other side?"

Olenchuk also rose to his feet, square-shouldered, dishevelled, a coppery red in the light of the lamp.

"Well, if need be. . . I can do it."

Suddenly it seemed easier to breathe in the room. Everyone cheered up and started talking.

"Anyone can see you're a soldier," one of the staff officers standing by the window remarked. "You've been at the front yourself, haven't you?"

"Marched all over the Carpathians in my time."

"Have you a big family?" Voroshilov asked.

"Houseful of youngsters. . . . And the eldest is with your men somewhere, in the First Mounted."

"He's a hero then!" Budyonny said and laughed.

Frunze went up to Olenchuk.

"I consider it superfluous to warn you, Comrade Olenchuk, that what we've just talked about is absolutely secret."

"You needn't worry about that, Comrade Commander. . . . I'll be right in front myself, won't I?"

"Quite true. Well, that's settled then. Stay at home and don't go off anywhere."

As he was putting on his hat, Olenchuk suddenly remembered something: "Maybe I ought to have a note or something. . . . In case they try and send me off with a baggage train."

"That's all right," Frunze smiled. "I'll arrange that straight away."

He sat down at the table and wrote:

"Ivan Ivanovich Olenchuk is engaged on service matters.

Frunze, Commander of the Southern Front."

28

Olenchuk left headquarters, deep in thought. Night had fallen. The wind had strengthened and was bitterly cold. Heavy gusts from behind the buildings pushed Olenchuk along and his legs carried him of their own accord towards the Sivash.

The village was still full of noise and movement. Traffic was rumbling along the dark streets; ammunition carts clattered past, messengers on horseback made their way hurriedly through units of newly arrived infantry that had halted in the road waiting for orders. In every corner, sheltering from the wind, dark groups of soldiers could be seen by the glow of their cigarettes. And still the roads across the dark steppe trembled under the constant rumble of wheels and the heavy tread of fresh columns marching into Stroganovka from the north.

Olenchuk walked with slow deliberate steps between the halted columns, listening to the talk of the Red Army men.

"They said there was a sea, but where is it?" a young voice spoke in the darkness.

"Where's all those golden beaches and bourgeois palaces?"

"Can't keep his teeth from chattering and now he wants beaches," another voice laughed. "Get across the Sivash first, boy."

"What is the Sivash?"

"A huge bog, an endless marsh, that's the Sivash for you. . . ."

A soldier with his collar pulled up over his ears, dancing up and down to keep warm, asked Olenchuk for a light: "Give us a light, grandfer. . . ."

Olenchuk smiled to himself in the darkness. Little did the lad know what kind of a grandfer he had in front of him.

Olenchuk now looked upon everyone and everything with the eyes of a guide. They were not just thousands of soldiers but men who were very close and dear to him, the men he was to lead across the quaking Sivash marshes at night, and with whom he himself might perish somewhere over there, on the Crimean shore. No one yet knew of the task he had been given, of the historic conference in which he had taken part, sitting at the same table as generals of the people. To all these soldiers he was merely an ordinary peasant, one of the locals, a bewhiskered "grandfer" in a shepherd's cap, yet already he was in the grip of the coming exploit. Now everything around him, and the thousands of men he was to lead, appeared to him in a fresh light. Had he, a Sivash salt-gatherer, even thought

that this knowledge of the secrets of the Sivash he had acquired over so many years would one day be needed by the people?

He reached the shore of the Sivash before he realized it. From here, in the daytime, when there was no mist, you could see Perekop on the right, and far away in front, the faint dark line of the Crimean coast. The expanse of the Sivash was now veiled in mist and darkness, overlaid with heavy autumn clouds. The familiar islands of rushes were rustling in the wind. Olenchuk went down to the shore and the exposed grey flats showed dimly at his feet. From here the water had already abated, the top layer of silt had been hardened by the frost, but a man had only to tread on it and his foot sank deep into the clinging mire. It would be a hard crossing, even if you knew the Sivash like the palm of your hand. But Olenchuk couldn't have refused back there, at headquarters. He knew he had a wife and a brood of youngsters that he would be sorry to leave orphaned, but wasn't it for their happiness that he would lead the army across the Sivash?

He climbed on a hillock and stared intently into the blackness of the distant shore, towards which the wind was driving the low masses of cloud. He had a new measure now for the dark reaches of the Rotten Sea, its capes and sandbanks, its tortuous fords that he had crossed and recrossed so many times in the course of his hard-spent life. Now the Sivash stretched before him not as a familiar gathering ground for salt but as a huge fording place for his army.

Time and again Olenchuk's thoughts returned to those with whom he had made common cause, with whom he would share the future. From now on he belonged to them entirely, body and soul, as they did to him. The Red Army men were having their supper in the cottages cheerful and free of care, and he was with them. They stood in columns, shifting from foot to foot to keep some warmth in their ragged boots and clothing, and he was there, too. They were marching towards Stroganovka over the ringing, frosty fields and he, Olenchuk, marched at their side in the bitter wind.

## 29

The forward units of the Siberian and Ural regiments had some days earlier launched a flying attack on the Perekop positions in an effort to break through into the Crimea on the heels of the retreating enemy forces. They had got as far as the Perekop wall itself. It was at night, in unfamiliar country. No one had any idea of the enemy fortifications, but nevertheless the troops went straight into the attack, so great was their momentum and their desire not to allow the enemy to dig in in the Crimea for the winter. But the attempt to breach the wall at night failed, and when it became clear that with the forces at their disposal the task was impossible, the regiments were forced to retreat into the steppe, suffering heavy losses.

Dressing stations and headquarters were massed together at the village of Preobrazhensky, not far from Perekop and the gulf. At one time a landlord's

country mansion had stood there surrounded by silvery poplars, and beyond the mud-walled labourers' huts with their heavy tiled roofs the broad vineyards stretched down to the seashore. Knowing that the village was crowded with Reds, the enemy bombarded it mercilessly with heavy naval guns from the gulf. Trees were torn up by the roots and buildings collapsed, burying the wounded alive.

The enemy artillery also hammered away tirelessly at the town of Perekop, even though there was nothing left of it but a heap of rubble gleaming whitely in the steppe in front of the fortifications, like a great mound of rain-washed bones. The town no longer existed, everything was shattered, razed to the ground, but the enemy went on dumping shells into it, knowing that even among the ruins there were daring reconnaissance scouts, who, from behind the surviving chimneys, from the district jail that by a miracle was still standing, from behind every stone, were studying with vigilant eyes the grim line of enemy fortifications towering above the steppe.

Meanwhile more and more Red reinforcements were coming in from the north, followed by artillery. The villages along the Sivash were packed with soldiers. But not only the villages; even in the open steppe in front of Perekop there were plenty of troops. Some of them, those further north, out of range of the enemy's artillery, trained patiently at dealing with barbed wire entanglements; others who were closer and forced to keep their heads down by the enemy's fire lay scattered across the steppe, unable to stand up straight for days on end. Thousands of eyes watched the enemy stronghold that had got to be taken.

One day the Red command offered the Whites the chance of surrendering and sending out their envoys. The Whites' answer was to open fire even more furiously from the Perekop wall. But at the hour proposed for negotiations the firing suddenly ceased and a trumpeter bearing a White flag came down from the wall, accompanied by an officer who was to conduct the negotiations.

It was Captain Dyakonov, quite recently restored to his former rank. A Red negotiator, also accompanied by a trumpeter rode in from the steppe to meet him. Before leaving, he had been summoned by Division Commander Blücher, who had explained matters and warned him frankly of the danger.

"They're quite likely to kill you before you get half way there. Do you still want to go?"

"Yes."

The two envoys approached each other across the Perekop steppe in full view of the waiting armies. Committed to a mortal struggle, the two opposing camps watched with thousands of eyes as they moved step by step towards the weed-covered mound, where they were to meet. They halted facing each other, the trumpeters remained standing at a distance.

It was as though something supernatural were expected of them, something beyond human strength. Perhaps they really would reach agreement? And the shells would no longer whine through the air, and the wounded no longer moan, and death no longer scour these lands, and no more human blood be shed! Was

it impossible? What if the trumpeters with their shining trumpets were really just about to turn round and proclaim, each to his own army, that joyful news?

The battlefield stretched grimly under the low-hanging clouds. The white flags of the envoys flapped in the keen wind from the Sivash.

What were they talking about? Were they talking, or perhaps they were just looking at each other?

They were in fact looking at each other. When he left the wall, Dyakonov had expected to meet a formidable commissar with a jaw of iron, but the man who strode lightly towards him was a slim youth in a shabby greatcoat and cloth helmet with a large scarlet star in front. Who was he? A Lett or a Poltava man, a peasant from Viatka, or perhaps from Tula? . . . What had brought him here, what force had drawn him into the mighty whirlpool of the Revolution? In his scanty clothing and battered boots the youth tried not to show that he felt cold, but his body winced involuntarily in the penetrating blast and the wind whipped tears from his eyes, and yet his face still looked cheerful, almost smiling.

"Who are you?"

"I am an envoy of the Red Army. Who are you?"

"I am the White envoy. What have you to tell me?"

"Here is the order. The Perekop garrison must surrender."

Dyakonov took the order in silence.

"We are not bloodthirsty," the young man continued. "The Red Army man is to be feared in battle, but we don't kick a man when he's down. If you surrender we promise you your lives."

He spoke firmly and with conviction. His face was open and inspired confidence. Dyakonov caught himself experiencing a feeling of intense, almost morbid interest in his enemy. A curious situation. Behind Dyakonov stood the best fortifications in the world, with thousands of embrasures and reinforced concrete dug-outs, fortifications embodying all the ingenuity of the best military engineers in Europe, all the experience of the terrible battle of Verdun, but what had *they* behind them, what force was there to support him, this wind-swept Red envoy? Only the bare steppe lay behind him, with no fortifications, and yet it was not Dyakonov who dictated to him, but he who dictated to Dyakonov his will and the will of his army.

"It's no secret that a lot of blood has been shed, but we, Bolsheviks, were forced by necessity. . . . But now, if you lay down your arms, it will be all over."

Where was it, this army? There was not a soul to be seen in the steppe though Dyakonov knew that they were there in countless numbers. Grey, inconspicuous, they lay on the grey rolling plain, with no protection from a hurricane of fire. As yet they were showing no sign of themselves, not even raising their heads under the guns aimed at them from the wall, and only thousands of eyes watched their envoy standing unprotected in front of the wall and speaking on their behalf.

"The Revolution is generous. Our aim is not war, but peace, so that we can build a new life."

Dyakonov could go now, he had the packet in his hands, but still he could not bring himself to do so. He wanted to hear something more from this young man in the cloth helmet, he wanted to ask him something important, perhaps the most important thing in life. . . .

Yet again it was not Dyakonov who spoke, but the young Red Army man. "What about you? Do you know what you are fighting for?"

In the impassioned note that had come into his voice Dyakonov clearly detected a naïve desire to convert him, the White envoy, here and now, without waiting for Perekop to surrender.

"What's it for? Who's going to gain by you shedding your blood?" the Red Army man went on enthusiastically.

"I have not been authorized to talk to you on that subject."

The Red envoy smiled.

"But I am authorized to talk to you about anything my Bolshevik conscience dictates. We shall beat you, no matter what happens, we shall beat you if you don't surrender!" he said with a proud and joyful challenge in his voice and, glancing at the wall, added: "What have you got to rely on? Those fortifications? You think they're impregnable? There's nothing impregnable against us!"

"Why?" Dyakonov burst out involuntarily.

"The people are for us. If a hundred of us fall, a thousand rise to take their place."

Dyakonov looked at him and felt what strength, what unconquerable faith was beating in this young man's breast. Unarmed, almost barefoot, he stood exposed to the bristling open muzzles on the wall, and yet he seemed to feel stronger than those concealed behind them.

"You can kill me, but our idea, the thing I've got inside here," he struck his chest, "can never be killed!"

Evening was coming on and the sky over Perekop had sunk even lower when, accompanied by a flourish of trumpets, the two envoys turned back to their own camps. They walked back and the trumpeters blew at their upraised trumpets and the armies listened intently to the sound, trying to guess by its tone what news it heralded. Perhaps this was really an end of bloodshed? There would suddenly be no need for all this barbed wire, for the high explosives planted in the earth, for the gun-barrels ranged along the wall?

The envoys drew further and further apart, the trumpeters melted into the dusk. They could scarcely be seen in the early autumn darkness and now the sounds of their trumpets were scarcely audible over the huge field of Perekop, and there was no telling whether it was the trumpeters announcing, each to his own side, his stern and anxious truth, or the bitter wind whistling across the steppe, driving the tumblegrass away into the dark abyss of the Sivash.

And when it was quite dark, the batteries on the enemy wall belched fire and the powerful searchlights drove their blue swords across the clouds into the depths of the quiet, troop-filled steppe.

On November 7th, the third anniversary of the October Revolution, meetings were held in all the villages along the Sivash and among the Red Army units scattered over the steppe. The men who spoke gave their oath to achieve fresh victories in honour of the great anniversary, and to carry the Red banner into the Crimea. Everywhere the morale of the troops was so high, they were so anxious to put an end to the war at a single stroke that it cost their commanders some effort to restrain them from premature action, from an immediate attack on Perekop.

And although the battle orders had not yet been announced, every man realized clearly what the strategy and direction of the main attacks would be. Some would make a frontal assault on the stronghold, the others would outflank it by crossing the Sivash. There was no third way.

"We'll make the Crimea ours even if we have to pave the way across the Sivash with our own bodies!" a young soldier with a bandaged arm shouted excitedly at a meeting in Stroganovka, shaking his fist in the direction of the Sivash; he, like many other wounded, had refused to go to hospital.

After the meeting, the accordions played in the village until morning and there were songs and general merry-making.

That day Olenchuk was seen with Frunze above the Sivash. At first they stood on a low hill sloping down to the Sivash, then a machine-gun cart arrived and they got into it and drove along the Sivash in the direction of Vladimirovka.

What could they be talking about, what secrets could they be sharing, a simple Tavria salt-gatherer and a commander of the Red Army of country-wide renown? Perhaps Olenchuk was telling him what he thought about things, about his life with its meagre joys and wealth of grief, the arduous working life of an ordinary man. Perhaps, on the contrary, Frunze was telling Olenchuk about himself, about his youth on the barricades and in tsarist gaols, about the sleepless nights in the Nikolayevsk penal centre and in exile, about his escape through the wild forests of the taiga.

Frunze was one of those popular military leaders brought to the fore by the Revolution who, having reached a high position, always remembered that he was, first and foremost, a Communist and a revolutionary. Frunze could not imagine his military work without the closest contact with the working population of the localities where he had to operate with his forces; at difficult moments he invariably sought support and assistance in the heart of the people. It had been so on the Eastern front, in those critical days when the whole working population of the local provinces had been raised to defend the Volga. It had been so in Turkestan. And so it was here. It was this trait, characteristic not so much of generals as of revolutionaries, that had brought him and Olenchuk together in this village on the shore of the Sivash.

They drove along the autumnal Sivash and, without thinking about the difference in title and rank, about the formal distance that should, it would

seem, separate a peasant from a general, felt themselves quite simply to be two equals having a serious and thoughtful conversation.

Olenchuk did most of the talking and Frunze listened, occasionally interrupting Olenchuk's unhurried narrative with a question.

"As children we just grew here like the grass, half of us died, and the ones that grew up, the tsar gladly took for his soldiers, and then we became infantrymen, hussars, gunners, and cavalymen. They didn't grudge the Cross of St. George for us, they didn't grudge us praise, but they grudged what we valued most of all—freedom. Our necks, they said, were so fitting for the yoke. And they even went so far at times as to harness us up like real oxen to pull a plough, and all you could do was grunt and pant as if you weren't a human being. But then you'd straighten up and take a look round and say to yourself: 'No, we are men after all! . . .'

"We, the Stroganovka folk, come from the Cossacks of the Zaporozhye Sech. When Catherine gave out the land, she gave us this Rotten Sea, and we called it the Sivash, because it's all *siv*y, grey with salt, when the wind blows the water out of it.

"And so we live here. You've seen my hut, made of goosefoot and clay, the same as any shepherd's hut on the shore of the Sivash. And we go on living here from one generation to the next, beside our Rotten Sea. The wind for our clothing, the sky for our roof."

His story flowed on like a song, like a sad reverie, and as Frunze listened to it he felt himself no longer the commander of an army but a rank-and-file soldier of Lenin's great Party, a revolutionary who had devoted his life to the happiness of the people. Prisons, exile, penal servitude—it was all for that. He remembered his last meeting with Lenin in the Kremlin. They had met on the staircase, Lenin had been in a hurry. "So you are off, young front commander? Good luck! Good luck!" And he had gripped his hand hard in farewell. As he hurried on down the stairs, Lenin turned and, screwing up his eyes, called back: "Ask the people's advice! Please, do ask their advice as often as you can!"

Those words had sunk deep into Frunze's mind and engraved themselves there: *Ask the people's advice.*

"It was not much of a life, Comrade Frunze. We'd take our salt to Chaplinka or Kakhovka, sell it, get drunk and smash somebody's face in, or get ours smashed in instead. . . and that was about all the joy we ever knew. I'd look after the sheep on the estates. I'd dig wells. And collect salt. Summer after summer my feet would be all covered with sores from wading barefoot in the salt lakes. . . ."

"There was a salt trade going on here, was there?"

"The main salt deposits are further down from here, the Crimean merchants used to rent them. But here we used to get it at night on the quiet, because it was well guarded. Hard work it is, too! In the heat the salt lakes boil like a vat. You get sores on your feet, sores on your hands, but you go on wading about those boiling lakes because they give you your daily bread."

And so Olenchuk's sad reverie flowed on, rousing in Frunze thoughts of all he had lived through in prison, all he had suffered and thought about in exile. He had never been in these parts, never seen how the people lived here collecting salt, exiles in their own land, but it seemed that even without knowing them, he had often thought of them and their unhappy lot.

"Ask the people's advice, as often as you can!"

He had already received a telegram from Lenin here, on the Southern front. "Remember, at all costs you must get into the Crimea on the heels of the enemy. Make thorough preparations, make sure you have studied all the fords. They're essential for the capture of the Crimea." Lenin, the leader of the world proletariat, in the midst of all his vital affairs, had found time to think whether the fords across the Sivash had been studied. And he was quite right, the Red Army's daring, their willingness to march through the bogs and marshes of the Sivash would not be enough. All the strength of the people's wisdom, all the lifelong experience of people like this man here must be placed at the service of the Revolution. Frunze glanced at Olenchuk.

"Do you think we shall succeed in finding guides in Vladimirovka and other villages?"

"You need have no doubt of that, Mikhail Vasilyevich. You'll find guides for the Red Army anywhere, from Chongar to Perekop. If it had been for the Whites, we shouldn't have had any. Last year, as soon as the French started putting up the first defences at Perekop, their experts started asking about the Sivash too. They went around asking the peasants whether it froze up in winter, were there any reliable fords that troops could use. . . . But they couldn't get any sense out of anyone."

"So you didn't give the secret away?" Frunze smiled.

"People kept that secret for their own sons, for the people's army."

"So a lot of people know about it?"

"Old folk tell us these fords across the Sivash used to be known to the Zaporozhye Cossacks. They must have passed it on to us, I reckon. It came down from generation to generation till it reached the present day, so it could do our sons and the people's army a good turn. No, there'll be no shortage of guides, Mikhail Vasilyevich."

"But we can't take just anyone for a guide. We've got to have very reliable people for a job like this." And, bending close to Olenchuk's ear, Frunze asked: "Do you know who you'll be guiding?"

"Soldiers, of course," Olenchuk shrugged his shoulders.

"Not just ordinary soldiers. We are entrusting you with our best and dearest—the flower of the Red Army. You'll be guiding the assault column of Communists."

"Well, Comrade Frunze," Olenchuk said after a pause. "What's dear to you is dear to us. Like you, we stand firm for Lenin too. It's the first time we've known a government of our own and 'the earth belongs to us, the people,' as they sing in the *Internationale*."

The machine-gun cart drove on and on along the Sivash. The water had fallen and the bed of the Rotten Sea was laid bare, grey and covered with a salty film, under which the deep clinging marsh was freezing. As he listened to Olenchuk, Frunze never let his eyes wander from the broad sweep of the Rotten Sea, and as he looked he experienced a vague sense of alarm. It stretched away to the horizon, a boundless expanse of unsolved riddles and undiscovered secrets. His divisions had to cross these treacherous, rotting flats, and what would they meet on the other side? In his active imagination he saw the shores of the dead peninsular, entangled with barbed wire, and its fortifications that had taken the enemy all the summer to build; earthworks rose high above the shore and from every Crimean knoll and hill powerful batteries turned the muzzles of their guns to meet his assault troops.

31

In the evening Olenchuk went home. When he entered the cottage, he looked at his wife and the first thing he asked was: "Where are the children?"

His wife was rummaging in the chest. She turned in surprise, wary at his sudden question.

"Why?"

"I just wanted to know. . . . It doesn't matter."

His wife guessed at once by the dull harsh tone of his voice that something had happened. But she asked no more questions.

"They've gone round to the neighbours to listen to the accordion," she answered and, leaving the chest open, began making the supper.

Olenchuk threw off his leather jacket and sat down on the bench.

"What about our lodgers, where are they?"

"They're there too. . . . Having fun enough to bring the house down."

When she had put the supper on the table, his wife busied herself again with the chest.

"We'll have a hospital here too, Ivan."

"A hospital?" Apparently he had been thinking of something else.

"Vdovchenko came round from the revolutionary committee and told me to get the hut ready. So I've been looking out some stuff. What do you think, will this do for bandages?"

Standing by the chest, she threw a length of unbleached homespun over her shoulder.

"I was going to make the children shirts for Easter out of it, but Easter's a long way off yet. We'll have to bandage the wounded with something. It's rather thick and rough, but it's clean."

Olenchuk stared gravely at the cloth in the hands of his wife with whom he had shared so many years of joy and grief. You don't know yet, Khartina, who you may be bandaging. You may be tearing up your clean cloth to bandage your own man, his body riddled with bullets or shrapnel. Maybe you'll be left a widow with the children to look after all by yourself in your old age. . . .

"Why don't you speak?" His wife asked coming up to him. "You were silent yesterday and today you sit there, black as thunder! What do they want of you up at headquarters? What's made you like this?"

Olenchuk seemed to awaken from sleep, smiling at his own thoughts.

"No, that baron doesn't know Olenchuk yet," he said almost to himself. "I expect he thinks Olenchuk's back is a slate for him to draw pictures on for ever with his ramrods. . . ." Then he broke off and added cheerfully, rubbing his hands: "Let's have some supper, Kharitina."

He had not noticed that the supper was already getting cold on the table before him.

The lamp flickered, the wind rattled the window-panes. Autumn sung plaintively in the chimney.

He had only just picked up his spoon when the door swung open with a crash and the children, his own and the neighbours', rushed into the hut together with the Red Army lodgers.

"Daddy, we've learned a new song!" Mishko, one of the elder boys flew up to the table and sang the lines all in one breath.

And Kirilko, the youngest, dived out of the crowd of Red Army men and joined in spiritedly with the refrain:

*Ye enemy hords, tremble in fear,  
The Red Army's coming, the Red Army's here!*

The lodgers laughed and Kharitina laughed, too, as she stood at the stove, shifting her glance from one lively-voiced "volunteer" to the other; they seemed to flutter about the cottage like birds in their tattered shirts.

Before Olenchuk had time to exchange a few words with his lodgers, someone began knocking loudly and insistently on the window.

"Who's there? Come inside!"

It was the headquarters messenger, a lively lad with a carbine over his shoulder.

"Come on, dad! They're waiting for you."

A silence fell as all eyes turned on Olenchuk in surprised respect. Rising unhurriedly, he pulled on his jacket and cap, and took his staff from the corner.

The children sensed something and clung round him: "Where are you going, daddy?"

He laid his hand on the head of the youngest.

"Don't ask too many questions," he said softly.

At the threshold he turned to his wife and their eyes met. Understanding everything, she silently made the sign of the cross behind him as he walked out.

The assault column was already drawn up along the Sivash. Their unfurled banner rustled in the darkness. Long branches with bunches of rushes at the tops which they had prepared beforehand to serve as markers showed in the darkness above the men's heads.

It was about ten o'clock. The Sivash was immersed in cold thick mist. Icy drops, sharp as glass, lashed the men's faces and eyes. Here and there in the endless line of assault troops a cigarette glimmered, showing up a stern lean face, an upturned collar, a helmet pulled down over the ears.

"Comrade Commissar!" the messenger called out in a ringing voice. "The guide is here!"

From somewhere under the banner a tall man in a leather jacket and cavalry helmet stepped out to meet Olenchuk.

"Hullo, Comrade Olenchuk. . . . So we meet again. Don't you recognize me?"

"No, who are you?"

"Leonid Bronnikov, leader of the column. Are you ready?"

"I am."

The commissar turned to his men.

"No more smoking, comrades. Pass it down the column: no lights, no noise. Check everything. Strap up your wire-cutters and grenades so that nothing rattles."

And turning to Olenchuk, he ordered:

"Guide, forward!"

## 32

Their greatcoats rustled as they marched, and thousands of feet crunched dully on the dry frosty flats.

"Artillery could drive across here," came a voice from the front. "It's hard as iron."

"It is so far," the guide responded. "But it won't be so further on."

"Do you fish for your living?"

"The fish can't live here, comrade. I'm a salt-gatherer. Salt's the only thing that grows here. But if there's not much of that and you've got nothing to exchange for bread, you might as well starve to death. . . ."

"You've not had an easy life of it here either, mate, by the sound of it."

"No indeed, comrade. Where might you be from?"

"I'm from Petrograd. From the Putilov Works."

"Not seen home for a long time, I expect?"

"Haven't seen my family for over two years."

"It'll soon be over."

"It's got to be. As soon as possible." Olenchuk's companion bent forward as he walked and gave a sick throaty cough. "Today I had a letter from the lads at the works. 'We're expecting you home by the winter, Comrade Kapitonov,' they wrote. That's my name, Kapitonov. By winter. . . . You can work it out for yourself, mate. All the destruction, the blockade, and if you add another winter of war on top of it all. . . . No, it's time we finished it off!"

"Yes, it's time all right!" Leonid Bronnikov made the reply to himself. The feeling that inspired every man in the column was also his strongest desire, for he knew that this last battle would mark the beginning of a new life; people

would breathe freely; and if he lived through it, he would be able to experience the joys of peaceful labour and never be separated again from his wife and son. . . . He remembered his native village of Krinichki. Krinichki in the spring-time, all in cherry blossom! How far away it was from these treacherous autumn flats now beginning to squelch under his feet!

The distant campfires on the shore they were leaving behind grew smaller and smaller. They were serving as beacons. Bronnikov knew they had been lighted specially for them, for their Red advance guard, to make it easier for them to find their way across the Sivash. He knew that it was not only for the Stroganovka column that the beacons were shining that night. Others had been lighted in the neighbouring villages, for besides the assault column that had just left Stroganovka the spearheads of other Red divisions were moving parallel with it through the darkness of the Sivash, and at their head, feeling the ground with their sticks, walked other guides like Olenchuk from among the local population. For a moment Bronnikov had a vision of the previous year's tragic retreat from Kherson, the railways dismantled by the German colonists, the murmuring and discontent among the rebellious masses. . . . Could that same Olenchuk, as he had sat then, jogging along quietly on one of the baggage carts of the retreating army, ever have thought that in a year's time he would become a guide for crack regular units and be the first to cross the Sivash with them?

Olenchuk at the head of the column began to stop more and more frequently. When he did so, he would say apologetically to Bronnikov, "Believe me, Comrade Commissar, I've never been so afraid of making a mistake, of missing the path as I am this time. If you lose your way alone, you're the only one that suffers, but when you're entrusted with a force like this, no one will ever forgive you if you make a mistake; your children, and grandchildren, the whole people will curse you for it."

The Stroganovka beacons had by this time melted away into the mist and the column was wrapped in icy darkness. The squelching grew louder and the earth heaved and sagged underfoot, as though the Sivash were breathing.

They had covered a third of the distance over almost firm ground and only now had they reached the marsh which had given the Sivash its name as the Rotten Sea. The silty bed of the gulf grew springy and underneath the *chaklaks*, the black, bottomless pits of mire lay in ambush, like deadly traps awaiting their victims.

"Careful!" Olenchuk called out from time to time, as he weaved in and out among the *chaklaks*, feeling the ground with his stick, and the warning was repeated huskily down the column.

Progress was now much slower and the route veered now to left now to right. More and more often the men sank knee deep in the thick cold mud. The squelching never ceased. Every step was an effort, a strain on the whole body. Bronnikov felt his boots were already full of mud and ice-cold water; the brine made his blistered feet smart and sting. His trousers and greatcoat were wet and heavy, and the salt mud crept gradually all over his body, until even his hair was matted with it.

No one paid any attention to the cold and the frost, although their clothes were stiff as boards. The men flung their coats open and marched on, dripping with sweat, breathing in painful gasps. Groups of two or three were carrying machine-guns.

Every hundred paces they planted a pole. Fewer and fewer poles in the column, more and more along the path they had covered. The poles were to guide those who would soon follow them across the Sivash, who would follow the assault column with its hand-picked grenade-throwers and barbed-wire cutters, who at all costs, even life itself, must make a path for the main forces. In his mind's eye Bronnikov could see those poles strung out across the Sivash behind him, and could imagine the stream of cavalry, artillery, all the mass of troops crowded in Stroganovka and the other villages, that would, and perhaps already were, being guided across by them. The realization that he and his comrades were blazing a trail for a whole army kept Bronnikov in a state of exaltation and extreme physical and spiritual awareness.

Ahead lay the unknown, a peninsular entangled with barbed wire, a deluge of fire under which perhaps all these men of the vanguard would fall never to rise again; but stronger than death, stronger than the anxiety of thinking about what awaited them on the enemy shore, was the feeling of pride in his comrades, in the role that they were to play on this historic night. They were all his Party comrades, all men who shared something they valued more than their own lives. Formerly in exile, or working in the underground—proletarians, peasants, sailors—they had devoted themselves to a single cause: to win happiness for the people. It was this that gave them their fearless courage, their readiness, in defiance of death and in contempt of death, to cross the impassable marshes of the Sivash at night. All the summer they had fought in the steppe and their bayonets were a terror to the enemy, but even more terrible was their faith, their singleness of purpose, the fighting valour of their hearts.

"There's a pit here, comrades!"

"I'm sinking!"

"It's dragging me down!"

"Lend a hand, comrades!"

Some were pulled out, others it was too late to reach. A man had only to go a few paces off the path and he sunk in up to his neck. They had to join hands and move on in closed ranks.

Somewhere on the right the pale blue, weightless beam of a searchlight flashed menacingly in the mist. It brushed against a cloud and was immediately extinguished. After that the surrounding darkness seemed even more intense.

A little later several searchlights pierced the darkness simultaneously and began groping nervously across the misty flats.

The assault troops were ready for this. They crouched down and froze into immobility. And when one of the searchlights, feeling carefully for signs of life on the Sivash, reached the column, the group of crouching soldiers could have been taken in the eerie light for clumps of rushes and the black patches of the *chak-laks*.

The searchlight swept in another direction and again the order darted from mouth to mouth: "Forward!"

The wind suddenly dropped, but except for Olenchuk no one noticed it. This sudden calm alarmed the guide. The wind might change and bring in water from the Sea of Azov.

It was past midnight when the column, having crossed the stretch of marshes and *chaklaks*, finally dragged themselves, exhausted and plastered with mud, on to firmer ground.

They moved on, almost running, with their rifles at the trail.

"How much longer?" they asked Olenchuk impatiently.

"We're almost there now."

And suddenly, like a flash of lightning in a rainless night, the column was blinded for an instant by the glare of searchlights directed straight at them. The darkness broke apart, revealing to right and left the outlines of the cliffs and, quite near, a deep fence of wire entanglements covering the whole shore. This was the Crimea.

"Into line!" the order went along the column. "Cut the wire!"

Running past Olenchuk with a grenade in his hand, Commissar Bronnikov shouted to him: "You go back! You've got to bring the others across!"

And he ran on. When he sent Olenchuk out of the firing area, the commissar apparently never stopped to think that he himself was not proof against bullets, that he, too, was in danger. He rushed forward as if it were not war with its barbed wire and death that awaited him on the peninsular but merely some very urgent job which he must get done at all costs, and stay alive doing it. And it was a strange thing, but at that tense moment Olenchuk really believed that all the men he had been leading and who were now charging forward at their full height, would go on, just as they were now, through the barbed wire under the searchlights, through the fire of the peninsular, and nothing would harm them.

A torrent of fire poured down from the cliffs, bullets whined through the air, the first shell burst with a deafening crash, raising a fountain of mud from the bottom of the Sivash, but no force could halt the attacking troops, who rolled in a mighty wave out of the Sivash, bathed in the fantastic glare of the searchlights, and swept forward like a tempest.

Olenchuk no longer recognized the men he had led. Instead of the footsore, mortally weary soldiers who had recently been struggling in the marshes of the Sivash, an avalanche of quite different men swept past him, as though on wings. In their long greatcoats and tall helmets they now looked like giants in the deathly blue glow of the searchlights.

"Forward! Forward!"

They fell under the hail of bullets and again rose to their full height, hurling themselves with deadly determination at the coastal defences, smashing a way through with their grenades and deafening the whole shoreline with their united cheer:

"On to the Crimea!"

The news that Communist columns had crossed the Sivash by night and pierced the coastal defences at Litovsky Cape threw the White headquarters into confusion. They had crossed the Rotten Sea, they were attacking them in the rear! To close the breach, Wrangel was compelled to swing round two divisions from Perekop and throw in his best reserves. The guns on the Perekop defences were also turned on the Sivash. The Red regiments following in the wake of the assault column could now move over the exposed flats only in short runs amid the deafening roar of the heavy shells that were bursting all over the Sivash, throwing enormous columns of mud in the air. No one will ever know how many of those nameless heroes sank with their artillery and horses, their rifles and machine-guns for ever into the bottomless sloughs of the Sivash.

It was the 8th of November, the first day on the other side of the Sivash, on the Crimean soil.

That day found Danko Yaresko in the open steppes of Perekop at a deserted shepherd's camp, where the men of one of the assault detachments of the 455th rifle regiment were sheltering while they waited for the order to attack.

The cold ate into their bones. There was no snow and the temperature was more than ten degrees below. Many of the men were frost-bitten. Thousands of those whose fate it was to wait in the open steppe gazed with envy at the distant windswept villages along the Sivash. There was warmth and life over there. In the steppe even the men from Siberia, accustomed to the severe northern winters, suffered most of all from this fierce cold, from the black snowless Tavrian winter with its cutting steppe winds.

Under such conditions this derelict shepherd's camp was a find for the Red Army men. Yaresko knew the district well and he also knew this camp, which the shepherds used to call Pekelny camp. When he had been working for the Faltzfeins he had often taken refuge with his flocks in this remote steppeland camp, where there had been huge pens for the cattle and stoves in the dug-outs for the labourers and shepherds, so that they could warm themselves here after days of wandering about in the icy cold of the open steppe. During the years of war the camp had fallen into decay, the wooden pens had been taken apart for fuel, the dug-outs had fallen in, and only a few heaps of clay and some of the wattle fences were left. It was under these that Yaresko and his comrades took refuge, bunching up close together.

The sooner they attacked the better! Every man had the same feeling. They knew that the whole country in these days of revolutionary celebration had its eyes fixed on them and was expecting them to deliver the final blow. They knew that their comrades were already fighting on the peninsular, after crossing the icy marshes of the Sivash by night. All day the artillery had been thundering here, too. The first waves of attackers, held down by its hurricane of fire, were lying somewhere just in front of the wall. And further back the whole steppe was full of them, as it is full of birds in autumn before they fly south.

"Comrade Commissar, when shall we be starting?" the Red Army men would ask impatiently of their commissar, Bezborodov, who in the past had been a weaver at an Ivanovo textile mill.

"Steady, comrades, steady!" he said, going from man to man, checking their weapons and the sharpness of their wire clippers.

"Is it a fact, Comrade Commissar," the young soldier Yermakov asked Bezborodov, "that Comrade Frunze comes from round our way, either Ivanovo or Shuisk?"

"I've also heard that he's one of our folk, from our Red province," Bezborodov answered smiling.

Seating himself not far from Yaresko, the commissar watched this former shepherd silently build a small campfire out of dry dung and weed stalks.

"Anyone can see you're an old hand at the game," the commissar remarked, looking at Yaresko warmly. "You've lighted a good many campfires in the steppe by the look of it."

"Yes, I have," Yaresko replied and, lying flat on the ground, began coaxing the flames with his breath.

"Keep the smoke down so the enemy doesn't see it," Bezborodov advised and was the first to start fanning the smoke away with his hand.

The first flames leapt up and the shivering Red Army men crowded round them to trap what warmth they gave.

Jokes were cracked about the "hot times" they had had in another sense, and one of the veterans of the regiment told a story of how in the Orenburg steppes with Blücher they had escaped from the White Cossacks on a burning train. There had been a truck of cotton wool in front of the engine and another behind.

"The Whites set fire to the cotton wool with their bullets and the wind fanned the flames. What were we to do? Our sergeant felt his clothes beginning to catch fire so he shouted, 'Follow me, comrades!' and off we jumped at full speed, down the embankment. Blücher was not far away with his men and he had a Hotchkiss. We kept them off till help arrived."

Meanwhile some of the men started roasting some barley they had found somewhere.

"Have some! Black rice!" The Chinese Yaresko had seen in the battle during which Starkov had been killed rattled the tin with the burnt barley in it.

With the meticulous care of a chemist the Chinese measured out a handful of burnt barley for Yaresko, then gave the same to another and yet another.

"You have some, too!" said the Chinese to the commissar, who had waited till his turn came round, trying not to show his hunger.

The blackened "Perekop rice" crunched in the soldiers' teeth; their lips were black, but the food made them more cheerful.

They did not enjoy the warmth of the fire for long, however. The shelling started again, quite close, and it had to be put out.

Yaresko lay shivering beside his comrades on the cold frozen ground, which shuddered continually under the cannonade. A year ago, when he had been

charging about the steppe with Kiligei's rebel detachment, they had had only one gun and three shells, and they had fired them at the Perekop bell-tower like little children playing at war. That had been just a practice shot, to get the range. And Khorly, and the first storm of Perekop with the "ox battalions," and the raid on the Crimea, all that had just been practice shooting, a sort of rehearsal before the real fighting that had now just begun. It was a strange path Yaresko's life had taken him. He had travelled so many roads and now, here he was back at Perekop again. But now it was all quite different: the steppe, and the storm-clouds, and the Turkish Wall crouching like a tiger across the whole isthmus. There was something mysterious about it, something that kept the men's eyes riveted on it.

When, after the bitter fighting for the Kakhovka bridgehead, they had moved across the steppes which all summer had been a boundless field of battle, and the waters of the Gulf of Perekop had gleamed like steel under the autumn sky, and they had seen the wall, Yaresko had understood with his whole being that there could be no way back, that here they could only die or conquer. A wall 15 metres thick, machine-guns more than you could count, fortress guns. . . . All aimed against men attacking from the bare steppe.

His hands grew numb, his feet lost all feeling, the blood seemed to freeze in his veins. It was as if the very earth suffered from the cold. In spring it had been warm and covered with flowers, but now it had even cracked in the early frosts. A few snow-flakes whirled past. For some reason Yaresko remembered the flowering, grassy steppes of spring and felt the needle-thrust of the cold even more keenly. How much longer were they to lie here freezing? If only they could get on with the attack!

They would get up and advance over this grey autumn steppe that stretched to the sea on one side, and the Sivash on the other. He had tramped this steppe with a shepherd's staff in his hand in the sultry heat of summer and in the biting autumn winds, when migrating birds, frozen in their flight, plummeted on to the heads of the shepherds. He remembered the black storms, when the peasants carried their icons out into the steppe to pray and there was darkness even at noon. The mournful howl of the Sivash winds, how often had he listened to it in shepherds' camps like this? And now he was again shivering with cold in his native steppe, in his "wind-lined" greatcoat. Cold, was it? They would bear it! Hunger? They would bear that too. After all, it was the last time. There would be no more of this fighting, nor any more of the misery of hired labour, nor black storms, nor mothers' tears!

But let it come quicker! No force could stop them in this last assault. It seemed as if they had been gathered from all over the world, men with no rights of freedom in the past, and now ready for anything for the sake of new life. Siberians, Ivanovo weavers, Redguard Letts, whom the Revolution had brought here from the shores of the Baltic. This Chinese lad who had become a comrade of men like him, the poor labourers of Poltava region. They were all people who had never known life before. Not because they didn't love life, but because they had never been given a chance to live. They had stood it for a long time, but

in the end they had got sick of it, and now they had risen to gain all those things that belonged to a man by right, and no force could stop them.

Blue with cold, they jumped up as soon as there was a lull in the shelling and tried to make themselves warm as best they could. One man would dance up and down on the spot, another would flap his arms like wings. Some had no greatcoats at all and covered their shoulders with sackcloth and their feet with rags.

Something kept whistling in Yaresko's ears. Was it the wind rustling through the steppe, or someone humming a tune close by? Then there was a clang of metal on metal. He looked round. Muffled in his long coat, Levko Tsimbal was silently sharpening an axe, and Yermakov a shovel—to cut through the Perekop wire at night. The men were calling to each other, some were exchanging addresses. One was from the Urals, another from Ivanovo, another from Chernigov, yet another from Smolensk. But why was that little Chinese fellow sitting so quiet and sad, not giving anybody his address?

"Who can I write to about you?" Yaresko asked him.

"If you want to write about me... write to Comrade Lenin."

"Who?" the men who had heard his answer wanted to know.

"Lenin, the leader of the world revolution."

It was dusk when Frunze arrived at the regiment's positions.

He greeted Bezborodov and, still holding his hand, looked closely into his face, a brave face with sunken eyes and grey at the temples.

"Vanyusha?"

"Comrade Arseni?"

They embraced.

"So this is where we meet!" Frunze said, deeply moved. "It's been a long way from the cellars of Ivanovo to the fortress of Perekop."

"From the first barricades to the assault on the last citadel of the counter-revolution."

Then they turned at once to the matter in hand.

"How are your men, Comrade Bezborodov? What mood are they in?"

"They are eager to fight."

"Many frost-bitten?"

"Not very many, but there are some. Their clothes are worn out. See what rags they're wearing."

This was no surprise to Frunze. In the other units he had visited that day the situation was no better. Everyone was in rags. He had seen men with hardly anything on their feet, frost-bitten, blue with cold, just like these. The baggage trains had been left far behind. Even the supplies they had couldn't be brought up in time. Yet in spite of this, he had not heard a single complaint. Applications to join the Party were coming in in hundreds, the men were straining to get into battle, to gladden the hearts of their families at home with news of the capture of Perekop, to celebrate the third anniversary of the Revolution with victory.

The soldiers crowded round their commanders.

Frunze looked at them and his heart was filled with a warm feeling of brotherhood.

"How's it going, comrades?"

"Fine! Nothing to complain about."

"Cold?"

"Yes, it's a bit nippy. If we couldn't shiver we'd be frozen stiff."

And they laughed. They couldn't keep their teeth from chattering but they laughed. It was strange to hear the laughter of these ragged, shivering men who, clasping their rifles, clung together for warmth. What could their commander say to them? How could he shelter them from the wild wind that slashed them like a razor in the open steppe.

"It's hard, I know, comrades. But it's got to be done."

"We understand, Comrade Frunze. . . . We can't let it drag on till winter, we've got to hurry!"

"Have you heard the news? They're going strong on the Litovsky Cape. They've been fighting there since last night to make it easier for you to attack the wall from the front. I hope to see the Red colours hoisted on the wall by tomorrow morning."

"We'll do it all right, Comrade Front Commander."

"Tell Lenin that even if the sky falls in, that wall will be ours!"

Before he left, Frunze again went up to Bezborodov.

"Well, Vanyusha, I wish you luck! With men like these we've got nothing to fear." And bidding the troops good-bye, he said loudly: "Till tomorrow! Till victory, comrades!"

## 34

That night, after despatching his troops, Frunze arrived in Stroganovka, where he had made his headquarters at this critical time. On the edge of the village, just above the Sivash stood a little windswept mud hut. The leafless acacias moaned in the wind, sentries tramped about in the darkness, shivering with cold. Now and then a rickety door slammed and the little house hummed with voices, like a beehive. A maze of telephone wires, some from the steppe, others from the Sivash gathered in a bunch at the lighted window and disappeared inside.

The hut was full of soldiers, their eyes red from lack of sleep. The lamps were smoking, the floor was spattered with mud from the Sivash, brought in on the messengers' boots.

Frunze sat down at the table and listened to his Chief-of-Staff's report on the situation on the peninsular.

The situation was serious. The enemy was attacking hard. Losses were enormous. The assault columns had lost more than half their number. Units of the 15th and 52nd divisions, which had advanced during the day, were now once again pressed back to the very edge of the Sivash. There was a shortage of ammu-

dition and fresh water. Neither the ammunition carts, nor the field kitchens could get across to the peninsular; they were all bogged down. . . .

The Chief-of-Staff had not finished his report when a pale army signaller, plastered from head to foot with Sivash mud, appeared in the doorway.

"Comrades! . . . The sea! The sea's coming in against us!"

Frunze stood up and gave the signaller a stern glance.

"No panic! Report what's the matter."

Only then the signaller appeared to notice Frunze's presence.

"The wind's changed, Comrade Front Commander. . . . The water's rising and flooding the fords."

Frunze left the hut, accompanied by his staff.

The infinite darkness was saturated with wind. The sky over Perekop glowed purple, as over the crater of a volcano. Somewhere to the left, over the Litovsky Cape there was also a glare from the fires of Karadzhani. The Sivash was enveloped in darkness and it was impossible to see where the water was, but from the dampness of the air rising from the darkness one could tell that it was approaching.

"It was up to our ankles at first, then it came up to our knees and now some of us are standing up to our waists in water to hold up the wire!"

"Why hold it up?"

"The salt, it eats through the insulation."

"Hang it on poles."

"We haven't got any, Comrade Commander. There's a company of signallers taking the place of poles all the way across the Sivash."

Frunze visualized his signallers strung out across the Sivash in the wind, standing in the icy water holding up the wire in their frozen hands.

Accompanied by his staff, Frunze went down to the flats. Where it had been quite dry the day before there was squelching mud. Somewhere beyond the dark rushes they could hear horses snorting and voices shouting and cursing. Artillerymen were dragging a gun out of the mud.

Frunze and his comrades turned to the right and soon made their way on to a sandy bank—one of the fords that was not yet flooded. From there he could see the water advancing. With every gust of wind the waves rolled further west, sweeping over the fords. If the water went on rising like this, the whole Sivash would be under water by morning.

Concealing their alarm, the staff officers waited to hear what their chief would say. Everyone realized the danger. Soon all the fords would be flooded and the 15th and 52nd regiments would be cut off on the Litovsky Cape. Without cartridges, without food, without water. What solution would the front commander suggest? Perhaps he would order a retreat while there was still time, escape across the Rotten Sea.

"No, we can only go forward," Frunze said, as though driving away his own doubts.

And he began giving orders at once:

"Bring up the cavalry! Send the Insurgent Group across! Let them go to help our comrades while there is still time . . ."

"What message shall we send to the 51st?" one of the staff officers asked.

"Confirm the orders to launch an immediate frontal attack on the Turkish Wall and take it at all costs."

In a few minutes messengers were galloping away from headquarters in all directions, while orders flew along the wire to Perekop, racing the advancing sea:

"Sivash flooding. Situation critical. Attack at once!"

### 35

In Stroganovka the revolutionary committee sounded the alarm. The whole village was roused.

"Everyone to the Sivash! Stop the sea!" the word flashed through the dark streets.

Doors were torn from sheds and barns, gates and fences were pulled down. Everything went on to the carts, Stroganovka grudged nothing for its army. Soon the peasant carts were rumbling down to the Sivash, loaded with wood, straw, rushes, faggots and stone; men, women and children hurried along talking loudly, with spades and shovels in their hands.

Ivan Olenchuk arrived at the first ford at the head of a whole baggage train, having roused everyone in his part of the village, young and old, to save the ford.

Olenchuk had had no sleep for two nights, and for two nights he had not changed his saturated clothing, heavy with the salty mud of the Sivash. He had led several columns across to the Litovsky Cape, crossing the Rotten Sea under artillery fire there and back. When he led his last column, the Sivash had already begun flooding, he had to wade a lot of the way waste-deep in water, and it had been hard to guess the whereabouts of the flooded fords in the darkness. But for the markers put up by the assault column, he might have been sucked down into a *chaklak* himself by now. There were many wounded in the village, who had been sent across on stretchers from the other side. Olenchuk found himself watching them in search of somebody he might know in the assault column. But no, there were no familiar faces. Neither Commissar Bronnikov, nor the Putilov man, nor any of those first Communists were among the wounded. It was said that most of them had fallen trying to force the defences, and even those who were wounded did not want to go back to the rear, and remained on the cape.

The Sivash had become mortally dangerous now that its fords were under water. Wherever you went, shouts of alarm could be heard from men whose guns and ammunition carts had got stuck, and who were straining every nerve to drag the madly frightened horses out of the marsh. And elsewhere in the darkness men themselves were in torment. "Help, brothers, I'm drowning!" there would be a shout. Then he was gone. And the shelling was growing in intensity. The wounded collapsed into the water and the salty mud of the Sivash. From the increasing strength of the wind and the steady onrush of the water Olenchuk

could see that, far from being past, the danger was growing hour by hour. As he dragged himself out of the Sivash, he had shared his anxiety with the signaler and told him to report to headquarters that something must be done to save the fords.

And now the alarm had been sounded.

The alarm caught Olenchuk barefoot by his stove. Wet to the skin, exhausted by the long march, he was sitting trying to get dry by the fire, when the village was roused by the revolutionary committee's cry: all to the fords!

With his note from Frunze and especially as he had only just returned from the cape, Olenchuk could have stayed at home. The wounded men lying packed together on the straw all over the floor of the hut, for whom his wife was heating water on the stove, were quite sure that the master of the house would not fail to take advantage of his privilege as a guide, but to their surprise, Olenchuk, on hearing the alarm, got up to go.

"Where to, Olenchuk?"

"Out there." He wound his damp footcloths round his feet. "We've got to stop the sea, didn't you hear?"

"But you've only just got back. . . . Get yourself dry first, warm up a bit."

"Don't talk to him, comrades!" Kharitina interrupted. "You don't know him yet. Do you think he'd stay at home on a night like this? Another man would hide like a mouse. . . ."

"That's enough, woman," said Olenchuk rising. "When a man makes a road he ought to look after it."

And he was looking after it. Freezing in the icy water he hammered in stakes with his mallet, he commanded his Stroganovka neighbours as if he were their senior.

"Isn't that the wood you were going to use for rafters, Ivan?"

"Yes, it is. Come on, put it down here."

And the maple beams he had been saving for years for a new cottage were laid across the ford on the bottom of the Sivash.

All the villagers round the gulf came out to work that night. Stretching in a long line into the darkness of the Sivash they worked side by side with army sappers, digging ditches along the edge of the fords, throwing up a dam of mud and strengthening it with straw, rushes, and stones. The work was still going on when the Red Cavalry moved off over the peasant gates and doors which they had laid across the Rotten Sea into the lashing nocturnal darkness.

A black cloud was swooping low across the sky. No, it was not a cloud, it was cavalry. Now the jingle of bridles could be heard, and the rattle of sabres. Blacker than night, the banners streamed in the wind. The earth rumbled dully under the horses' hooves. A furious wind clawed mercilessly at the tangled, unwashed forelocks of Makhno's men.

Makhno's men were also attacking the Sivash.<sup>1</sup>

Did any of them want this campaign? Was anyone overjoyed by the ataman's wild whistle, the recognized alarm signal that had roused them from their warm cottages and brought them out into the dark windswept fields, as though for a voluntary raid of vengeance? Not *batko* Makhno who was now hopping about in his Gulyai-Polye capital on crutches, not Karetnik, who now led them, and not the lads themselves—none of them wanted this campaign. They did not want it, but they were in it all the same. There are some things in the world that no man can resist. Like a man who is swept along in midstream by the full force of the current and no matter how he struggles cannot swim ashore, so had they, too, been swept up by the mighty whirlpool, by some irresistible current that dragged them relentlessly where they had no desire to go. For the first time, taming their spirit of devil-may-care freedom, which took no account of anything but their own desires, they were going to fight for something they did not like, they were going to attack the cold, autumnal Sivash, that boundless Rotten Sea where they might drown both their horses and themselves in treacherous bogs.

The autumn cold beat in their faces. The night spread out before them as if it would never end.

"Hi, Karetnik, where're we going? What about turning back before it's too late?"

"Turn back? Where?"

Where? . . . The wind whisked his words away over the steppe, over the dark mass of cavalry.

A little later another group of riders could be heard shouting to each other: "Squadron Commander Derzky, this is your part of the country, isn't it?"

"What if it is?"

"The devil himself ought to be living here. . . . What a wind. . . ."

"A hell of a wind! . . ."

But Anton Derzky who was riding along with a woolly Caucasian cloak thrown over his shoulders, peering into the darkness, saw this region as something different—a land of blinding sun and spring blossoms, as it was at the time of that youthfully daring and joyful raid on Khorly. . . . What a time that had been! How the rebels of the steppe had shaken the mercenary souls of the hirelings of the Entente, with what dizzy intoxication they had flung themselves—with bare hands!—at the battleships and prevented them from reaching the Topoliny port and the sunny shores of Tavria. Why did he long for it all now, why was there such an aching and incomprehensible pain nagging

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<sup>1</sup>When Wrangel's forces occupied Gulyai-Polye and other districts formerly held by Makhno's bands, Makhno, who had retreated to Starobelsk, decided to offer his services to the Soviet government in the struggle against Wrangel. A telegram was sent from Starobelsk to Khar'kov, stating that Makhno was willing to cease hostilities and conclude an agreement with the Soviet government. The offer was accepted. Makhno's men agreed to obey the orders of the Red Command for operational purposes and their families were granted the same rights as those of Red Army men. According to the agreement, Makhno's cavalry was to take part in the storm of Perekop.

at him all the time? A thousand times he had risked his head, but what had he gained except this cloak billowing in the wind? Perhaps it was a mistake to have turned away from his brother when they had been retreating northwards with the armoured trains, perhaps his brother had chosen a truer path? How far apart their roads had diverged, but now they seemed to be coming closer again and would meet on the Sivash. He had heard that his brother Dmitro Kiligei in the First Mounted was back again in his homeland. What would their father, old Kiligei, have said if he could have seen both of them together before him! Where were you, and where were you? While his sabre flashed at the walls of Warsaw itself, you were swigging your home-made spirits in Gulyai-Polye and joy-riding with drunken harlots in your machine-gun carts.

And now what? To redeem his guilt? After the Gulyai-Polye orgies into the eternal font of the impassable Sivash marshes? And if he got across, what was on the other side? What would meet his gaze there?

The cannonade rumbled ceaselessly over the Perekop. The glow died out of the sky for a moment only to flare up again like the mouth of hell, like the open jaws of a volcano. Powerful searchlights pressed at the clouds, then swung down and began silently feeling the Sivash. The wind howled and the horses spread out across the steppe seemed to gallop of their own accord into those limitless expanses beyond which lay the unknown.

### 37

"Comrade Front Commander, the Insurgent Group has arrived!"

There was a note of derision in the brisk report. Frunze surveyed the new arrivals closely. By the dim light filtering through the windows of the headquarters hut he could see foam-covered horses' muzzles, their jaws champing at the bits. Unfriendly, weary faces, most of them young, hovered above them in the darkness. Forelocks, weapons of all kinds, glistening jerkins, billowing cloaks—so this was what they were like, these foot-loose kulak freebooters, this Makhno anarchist gang that no one had yet taken in hand!

The man who led the group made his report and remained in the saddle. He was one of the leaders, one of Makhno's closest supporters. A sheepskin cap was tilted dashingly on the side of his head. Twirling his moustache, he waited to know what the orders would be, and in the semi-darkness a wise and derisive smile seemed to hover under his moustache.

Frunze told him clearly what the task was. To cross the Sivash at once, while it was still possible, while the fords were not completely flooded.

The horsemen in front pretended they had not heard the order above the noise of the wind:

"Where to?"

Frunze repeated it louder:

"Across the Sivash!"

It roused them like a shot from a gun. Curses, oaths. . . . A growing roar of protest. The men in front turned towards the darkness:

"Hear that? They want us to ride into the sea!"

"Sending our horses and machine-gun carts into a bog!"

An indignant babble of voices rose out of the windy darkness:

"They want to drown us! That's their idea!"

"Take us for fools!"

"Let 'em send their own men first!"

Frunze had been prepared for this.

Checking his anger, he said: "Our best troops are already there, they've been fighting on the peninsular for more than twenty-four hours already."

The Makhno men subsided for a moment. Then someone found his voice:

"They're infantry!"

And again that protesting babble in the darkness:

"Infantry can do it! But cavalry can't cross the Sivash!"

"Half an hour ago," Frunze retorted harshly, "the Seventh Cavalry Regiment crossed the Sivash. It just went straight at it and got across. But perhaps you haven't got the same kind of horses?"

That was apparently something neither Karetnik nor any of the other riders had expected. The Seventh Cavalry had got across, so cavalry could cross the Sivash. That did away with their last argument. . . .

"This is my last offer." Frunze's voice was loud and firm. "Either we consider your conduct as treachery, or—across the Sivash!"

For a second everyone stood stock still. The black barrels of the machine-guns crouching on the carts pointed at Frunze out of the darkness. The hoods and black anarchist flags could be heard flapping in the wind. Then the horses' heads were reared up in a flurry of bared teeth and torn lips, and above the howling of the wind a wild shout rang out in the darkness:

"Across the sea—march!"

The Gulyai-Polye freebooters rode past Frunze with a trample of hooves and disappeared into the gloom, as though sinking for ever into the dark, mysterious jaws of the Sivash.

What had made them go, what power forced them? Frunze thought as he watched the disappearing Makhno cavalry. His own iron will? But they themselves had will enough to bite through the strongest bit! No, that wasn't how he had beaten them. . . . The truth of the Revolution was on his side. It was that which overcame them, that which forced them to attack that treacherous Sivash, though they hated going.

The rumble of batteries rolled across from Perekop, the guns flashed more and more often on the Turkish Wall, the searchlights groped feverishly across the steppe and the clouds overhead, as though expecting to find attacking forces even there.

So another assault had been launched. Regiments were advancing all across the Perekop steppe, wave after wave; thousands of living bodies were throwing themselves on the barbed wire.

"Comrade Front Commander!" a voice called to him. "Important message received."

Frunze returned to headquarters.

"The regiments of the 51st division and the crack artillery brigade," read the report from Perekop, "under the hurricane fire of the enemy, suffering enormous losses, pierced all seventeen lines of barbed wire entanglements and even in some places broke through on to the wall. Failing to consolidate, however, they were thrown back by a fierce counter-attack of fresh officers' units. They are holding positions in front of the wall. The 152nd brigade has been almost completely destroyed. Most of the commanders and political workers who led the attacks have died heroically."

Frunze froze at the table. A whole brigade wiped out! What men they were losing, and how many more would die before morning! The Party was sacrificing its best sons that night. But what else could be done?

With a deep sigh he commanded:

"Launch a third attack!"

### 38

The impenetrable darkness of the Perekop steppe, where every hillock concealed a man waiting for the signal to attack, was slashed by the cry:

"Forward!"

They got up, strung out in line and advanced.

With his head down against the wind Yaresko peered into the darkness. What lay ahead? An impregnable stronghold, they said. A wall of gun barrels and machine-guns? Still he would go on. Against the artillery, against the machine-guns and the barbed wire that covered the whole steppe.

Before his eyes he had a picture of the toil-worn face of his mother who seemed to be watching him from distant Krinichki, watching him get up to go into what might be his last attack. That sad glance seemed to say something to him:

"What are you saying, Mother?"

"Go!"

He saw his sister and she, too, said:

"Go!"

He saw his bride and she said:

"Go, go!"

They were advancing quickly, but still they were told to hurry.

"Faster! Faster!" Commissar Bezborodov's voice came through the darkness.

He knew why they must hurry. The Sivash was being flooded. In a little while their comrades would be cut off on the peninsular.

The wind whistled in the bayonets on either side of him. In the darkness Yaresko could not see how many of them there were, but he felt they were numberless, that the whole steppe was full of them, full of men marching into the

attack. For them cold and hunger no longer existed, there was only the desire to strike an immediate and crushing blow: "On to the wall!"

Yaresko felt a boundless pride in this great mass of men, as though he himself had assembled them, roused them and was leading them to attack the hated stronghold of grief and tyranny. Every step increased his strength. He felt that even if he fell in battle he would rise again from the dead and march on. For he was fighting against injustice. Against his bitter life of hired labour. Against his mother's constant grief. Against the labour fairs of Kakhovka, against the black storms that hid the sun!

Suddenly everything ahead was illuminated from earth to sky. Dozens of searchlights on the wall lighted their path with dazzling brilliance. Long tongues of flame burst out of the batteries. Heavy shells crashed into the frozen soil. A column of fire leapt up in front of Yaresko himself, blinding him with its unbearable flash. He felt himself hurled fiercely backwards. Dead or alive? There was a ringing in his ears and his whole body seemed to belong to someone else, but he jumped up, grabbed a rifle, his own or another's, and ran to overtake the advancing wave.

"On to the wall!"

As light as day, now the steppe was swarming with the lines of attacking troops. The air seemed to crack with the noise. Wave after wave, they ran along behind armoured cars, bayonets gleaming as far as the eyes could see, as far as the beams of the searchlights could reach. The first lines had already reached the wall, he could hear the frantic cry: "On!" and the fire poured down on them from above in a solid flood. Suddenly the earth spouted like a volcano with fire and stones. The first lines had exploded the mines planted in front of the wall. On! On! Yaresko could see Commissar Bezborodov running forward flinging off his greatcoat. The men were running; Yaresko, too, pulled off his greatcoat and he felt light and free, as though borne onward by the wind. Reaching a clump of barbed wire, he threw his greatcoat on it and stamped forward. In the darkness he again ran into barbed wire. Wire-cutters crunched heavily, panting men were feverishly cutting the wire to make a way through. For an instant rocket flares carved from the darkness a scene of thousands of men struggling in the wire, lashing it with shovels, tearing it with their bayonets, ready to gnaw through it with their teeth. Yaresko's hands were streaming with blood, the wire had cut them to the bone, his feet and legs were also lacerated, his whole body burned and stung. But stumbling through the wire among the heaps of dead, he pushed on with the living, further and further. The darkness vibrated with shouts and groans, but the dying shrieks were drowned by the unfailing shout: "Forward!"

"Forward!" the word burst from Yaresko's chest.

Now he was at the bottom of the ditch, more and more attackers were joining him every minute. The sheer wall towered above them to a terrifying height, coated with ice.

Before he had time to collect his breath, another command rang out: "Forward, comrades!"

Was it Bezborodov, or somebody else commanding the assault line he had led here? They started scrambling up the steep bank to the wall. With his torn, bleeding fingers Yaresko clawed at the frozen earth in the darkness, grabbing at an outcrop of rock, a strand of wire. He lost his foothold and rolled down, only to fling himself again at the icy wall with even greater fury. The face of the wall was plastered with climbing figures. Here and there a brief skirmish took place as the attackers bayoneted the enemy out of their strongpoints. The wounded fell with dying shrieks to the bottom of the ditch, but from there others began to climb. Men of different companies and different regiments were all mixed together. Someone voiced the idea of moving along the ditch to the right. The wall must end somewhere? Perhaps they would be able to get round the fortifications by sea? A group formed quickly and ran to the right along the ditch, towards the place where the wall should end, and where it did in fact end. But beyond it there were barbed wire entanglements, which extended far into the gulf, into the sea. The men waded up to their waists, but the wire was still there, up to their chests in the icy water, but still the barbs held them back. They went on without stopping, deeper and deeper—somewhere there must be an end to these defences? They would get round them so that they could attack the enemy in the rear, from the sea.

Yaresko climbed higher and higher up the wall. This icy monster must have a top somewhere? Where was it? It seemed to reach the clouds, but he would get there!

Wave after wave of attackers rolled in from the steppe in the glare of the searchlights, the whole area in front of the wall blazed with fire and echoed with the living pain of those caught on the wire, but from above, as though from the dark sky, the messages rang out along the front:

"Company of the 455th is on the wall!"

"Company of the 456th is on the wall!"

"Assault company is on the wall!"

And so across the whole isthmus, through the roar of battle, to the little headquarters hut with its windows that stayed lit all night in the windy darkness above the Sivash.

Surrounded by his assistants, Frunze stood listening tensely to the reports.

"Yes, I see . . . I see . . ." he murmured and his tired face grew slowly brighter.

The telephone receiver slipped from his fingers and he swayed as though he would fall off his chair. But the next moment he jerked himself to his feet, a younger man.

"Comrades, I congratulate you!" His voice broke with excitement. "Tell everyone . . . the regiments on the Litovsky Cape, the peasants along the fords . . . tell Comrade Lenin: the gates to the Crimea are open! The plans of the Entente have failed. The Red flag has been hoisted on the Perekop wall."

One by one the ships cast off and steamed out into the open sea. The shores they had left so ingloriously melted gradually into the cold autumnal gloom.

He would never see them again. What use had been the years of soldiering, of trenches and blood, what had he sweated for in those attacks across the steppe, for what cause had he risked his life in heroically bitter night assaults? To see his illusions shattered, to see these doomed homeless ships creeping away to unknown seas? What now? This cold autumn wind, where would it take the ships, what port would accept them? The deserted islands of the Aegean? The Belgian mines? Or would he once again find himself with a rifle in hand in some foreign legion to subdue rebellious tribes in the African deserts?

Somebody could be heard sobbing hysterically in the officers' ranks. No one paid attention to him. Everyone was silently taking leave of his native shores.

Farewell, farewell all. Word came up from the hold that a cadet and a Cossack corporal had shot themselves. . . . Well, perhaps that was the way out?

Shadows crept over the sea. The shore melted and disappeared. Without leaving the rail, Dyakonov felt in his pocket for his revolver. His hand lifted it automatically to his temple. . . .

### 39

Yaresko went only as far as Simferopol, with the advancing Red forces. His life took a sudden turn in a new direction. With the best fighters of Perekop Yaresko was sent to the Red Commanders' School in Kharkov.

Early in the morning he set out with his comrades on the road to Perekop. The sides of the road were littered with abandoned guns, gun-carriages with their harness slashed, ammunition carts, shell-torn armoured cars. Blood-stained bodies could be seen veiled in hoar frost on the fields. On the shoulder-straps of many could be seen the letters M or D, signifying the Markov and Drozdov regiments. Some of the rank-and-file had their shoulder-straps sewn on with wire so they should not tear them off in panic when the Reds pressed them hard.

Troops were moving continuously to and fro along the Perekop road. Cavalry, baggage trains, infantry. The men's faces were dark with exhaustion but everyone, like Yaresko, was in an elevated joyous mood. The last stronghold of the Whiteguard world had been crushed. The Crimea was cleared. The Red advance guards had arrived only in time to see the last ships filled with White refugees disappearing over the horizon. What the people had been fighting for so long was gained at last: the road to a peaceful life was open, there would not be another hard wartime winter. As during the early fighting, when the whole sky was singing with larks, and the Tavria rebels had ridden across the steppe with Kiligey, smoking out the interventionists, and it had seemed that only freedom and spring existed in the world, so now Yaresko felt utterly happy in his soul. Nataalka was in Chaplinka, waiting for him. He was going to study, to become a commander in the Red Army. When he got fixed up, he would bring her to Kharkov too. What a fine, broad life was opening up before him!

At one place yet another blast furnace had started working, somewhere else one more factory's chimneys were smoking. . . . It would not be long

now before the mothers in the villages would come out to meet the heroes of Perekop returning to their homes. The people would start living! The sharp sweetness of dawning life swept over Yaresko in all its freshness.

At Perekop, where the road crossed the wall, their passes were checked by the Red Army post.

Yaresko and his comrades on their weary mud-spattered Makhno horses were eyed suspiciously. The lads had huge packs of yellow Crimean tobacco strapped to their saddles. It was this apparently that had aroused the guards' suspicion.

"Who are you?"

"Can't you see?" Yaresko touched the Red Star on his helmet.

"What about the tobacco?"

"What about it? We've got a long way to go, so we've taken a good supply. We're off to Khar'kov to the Red Commanders' School there."

From somewhere above a stern voice shouted:

"Who's the senior man?"

Yaresko looked up and could scarcely believe his eyes. In a long cavalry greatcoat with purple collar tabs stood Dmitro Kiligei. His face had been burned even darker by the wind, his eyebrows had grown even bushier.

"Comrade Kiligei, don't you know me?"

"Oh!" Kiligei's bushy eyebrows shot up in surprise. "Here, come up here!"

Handing his horse's reins to a comrade, Yaresko went up on to the wall.

"Where are you bound?"

"They're sending us to study at the Red Commanders' School," Yaresko burst out excitedly, unable to conceal his joy at the meeting. "What about you?"

"They've made me commandant of Perekop, to catch the Makhno men."

"We had a bit of a tussle with them in Simferopol too. They started robbing the warehouses and all that kind of anarchy. . . ."

"That's it! 'Fighters for an idea,' they call themselves. Go about wrecking and beating people up. At Saki they killed a Lettish brigade commander. Well, we'll soon deal with them. . . ."

They walked slowly along the top of the wall. Heaps of empty cartridge cases crunched noisily under their feet, shattered dug-outs gaped up at them, iron girders protruding from the concrete. Wrecked guns, empty cognac bottles, tins were scattered everywhere; here and there still lay officers' corpses in their blood-stained British greatcoats. Not far away the people of the Sivash villages were already pulling down a part of the wall for fuel and building materials; they had received permission to do so from army headquarters.

"The engineers of the Entente did a good job here," said Kiligei, bending back an iron bar that blocked his way. "They put all their skill into it, they had everything measured up, all their targets mapped out. They made only one mistake. . . ."

"What was that?"

"They didn't take into account what the people can do when they're fighting for their rights."

Kiligei went up to the northern edge of the wall and nodded: "There's a fine bunch of turkey-cocks!"

Yaresko looked down. At the bottom of the ditch, between heaps of barbed wire was a group of Makhno men, guarded by Red Army bayonets. In their red hoods and black Caucasian cloaks they did look like turkeys.

"When did you get hold of so many?"

"This morning. First thing."

As he surveyed the Makhno men, Yaresko suddenly felt uncomfortable. What was this? A face was looking up at him from the bottom of the ditch. It was Anton Derzky.

"Anton here, too?"

"Yes, we had to take him in on a family basis, so to speak. They were all so loaded up with loot, they couldn't fly very fast. It was the loot that kept them from slipping away with their leader."

"Did some of them get away then?"

"Quite a few got through before I arrived, they tell me. Tacked themselves on to our baggage trains in the night—just try to catch 'em now."

As though sensing they were being discussed, the Makhno men glanced up hostilely, wildly, like beasts in a cage. They were smoking. Some of them laughed humourlessly now and then among themselves, as if exchanging grim jokes. Then their tousled heads drooped again in meditation. What were they thinking of now, herded together under guard at the bottom of the Perekop ditch? That they wouldn't be joy-riding round the Ukraine any more, like their friends who after scouring the Crimea with its minarets, had managed to slip through across the isthmus into the Ukraine, to their *batko* in Gulyai-Polye. Trapped by Red forces, Makhno would creep out of Gulyai-Polye one dark autumn night with a stolen pass-word and set off on his last plundering raid. For another year he would scour various provinces, until August 1920, when he and a handful of desperadoes would break through to the Rumanian frontier to place their rebellious forelocks at the mercy of the Rumanian king. That would be quite a different Makhno from the one before whom thousands of people have trembled and whose power in his "machine-gun cart republic" had been unlimited. While crossing the Zbruch, his horse would be shot under him and he would command his orderly to give him his own, but the orderly would refuse. And so the devil-may-care ataman of Gulyai-Polye would lose his power. His closest supporters would turn away from him in the time of crisis. Left behind to walk on foot, he would make his way alone to the foreign shore, loaded with gold that had nearly dragged him to the bottom. . . .

"Always remember that, Yaresko. . . ."

Both men, Kiligei and Yaresko, transferred their gaze to the boundless Perekop plain stretching before them. For the first time after all these days of firing and shell-bursts and shrapnel the Tavria sky was quiet. Fallen heroes lay quiet and motionless all over the steppe. Many of them still hung on the barbed wire. Somewhere among them were Commissar Bezborodov and Levko Tsimbal and thousands of others. . . . Just as they had hurled themselves at the wire,

there they remained fettered by the frost to the barbed entanglements. The grey greatcoats spread endlessly over the field. How many of them here? Probably not in all the three Russian revolutions had so much blood been spilled as was spilled here at Perekop, in three days and three nights. Those first Communists—the wire-cutters and grenade throwers—had consciously marched to what was almost certain death in order to open the road for the others. Those who had gone forward to take their places had fallen, too, and death had held no terrors for them. It was not because they did not value life, but because the desire to conquer was stronger than fear of death. They had marched into the Sivash marshes, waded in darkness through the icy salt lakes, charged forward in endless assault lines over the hard shell-furrowed earth of the isthmus. No one had driven them, no one had forced them—they themselves had sought the chance to attack in order to decide everything in one last battle; they had flung themselves at the wire to bite it apart; they had trodden on mines and been blown up, giving their lives for their own lofty ideal. Like the Revolution itself, they had been attuned to the future in every fibre of their being as they stormed the ice-covered impregnable wall, which had seemed to them the last obstacle on the road to something unknown and wonderously beautiful.

“For the happiness of the people. . . .”

The boundless Perekop battlefield under the autumn sky, with its thousands of dead, frozen in an eternal charge, in an eternal assault—all his life Yaresko would carry that grim picture in his heart.

*Translated by Robert Daglish*

*Illustrated by Pyotr Pinkisevich*

# Poetry

Vasili ZHURAVLYOV

## THE COMING OF JULY

Star-daisies dot the moonlit sky,  
Scattered about by night's warm hand.  
Hot, open-collared, comes July  
Upon the one-time virgin land.

It comes, and night-birds take to flight,  
Scaring away the daytime heat,  
While from the threshers, golden-bright  
Gushes the heavy-flowing wheat.

It comes, and engines roar and rattle,  
Not dying down until the dawn;  
Like tanks arrayed on eve of battle  
The tractors rally in the corn.

And there, where brand-new homes are scattered,  
The sunflowers catch our roving glance;  
Their golden tresses lime-bespattered,  
They join in gay "house-warming" dance.

The morning mist comes warm and luscious;  
To watch it spread is all I wish,  
While dawn divides the blue-grey rushes  
Beyond the mirror-smooth Irtysh,

To wake before the lightest sleeper  
Long, long before the dews are dried;  
To mount the platform of a reaper  
And with July's first sunrise ride,

The first, the fastest and the farthest,  
Holding the wheel with steady hand,  
Gladdening my homeland with the harvest  
Born on the one-time virgin land.

*Translated by Dorian Rottenberg*

### **MY TENT**

Gone is the battle from the grassy ocean,  
Calmed is the fury of the angry storm;  
But still it seems to be in restless motion—  
My white-winged tent, a bird of fancy form.

Against the future fields I see it flashing;  
It cuts the distant skyline's purple glass,  
And, like a lonely sail, through darkness dashing,  
It soars above the rustle of the grass.

*Translated by Marina Tarlinskaya*

**Semyon KIRSANOV**

### **MOVING IN**

I walked down Lenin Avenue,  
In the south-west direction,  
And watched the twigs, bright-green and new  
In all their spring perfection.

A universal moving-in  
Was bubbling on  
                    and swelling—  
A busy stream was hurrying  
To every new-built dwelling.

From upper floors you get a view:  
Green fields  
                    where cattle browse.  
The life will change, begin anew  
In white-walled,  
                    sunny house.

The happy spring, the cheerful spring  
Is never late in greeting  
All those  
    who morning songs still sing,  
And those  
    whose days are fleeting.

With voices every dwelling rings  
Up to the highest storey. . . .  
And now there comes, with other things,  
A bookcase  
    on a lorry.

Its shelves are ready for the books;  
And, up the stair comes rushing  
Its owner with his youthful looks,  
Excited,  
    panting, flushing.

His precious burden shows his aim—  
The books he holds so tightly,  
Bear on the cover Lenin's name  
In letters  
    shining brightly.

And, as I walked alone,  
    I thought  
That, like a song, it rouses  
And sweeps along—this life that brought  
The spring  
    to all these houses.

And what rushed by was life itself,  
Its torrent never ending. . . .  
It seemed to me—the books and shelf  
Were on and on extending.

And turning into busy streets  
And buildings  
    towering over—  
Those books, inspiring all our feats,  
With "Lenin"  
    on the cover.

*Translated by Marina Tarlinskaya*



*Skiers*

Yuri Korolyov and Boris Talberg



*On the City Outskirts*

Pyotr Ossovsky

In this issue we publish reproductions of some of the works displayed at the Exhibitions of Young Moscow Artists, and of the graduates of art institutes.



Pavel BUGAYENKO

## OUTSTANDING LITERARY CRITIC

*(Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Lunacharsky's Death)*

IN THE twenty-five years that have passed since the death of Anatoli Vasilyevich Lunacharsky, great developments have taken place in the Soviet Union and cultural life has gone forward at a rapid pace. Nevertheless, neither his name nor his work has been touched by time.

Lunacharsky was a talented poet and playwright, a splendid orator, a biting communist journalist, a brilliant critic, a great scholar of literature and a true connoisseur of art in Russia and Western Europe. He was a man of a wide and liberal education, of a versatile nature and of many gifts.

Gorky tells us in his reminiscences that Lenin said this of Lunacharsky: "An exceptionally gifted person. I'm very fond of him, you know. He's an excellent comrade!" In 1933 Lenin's wife Krupskaya wrote: "Vladimir Ilyich particularly appreciated Anatoli Vasilyevich for his ability, for this he loved him, he felt great affection for him and took a special attitude towards him. Anatoli Vasilyevich was not only talented; he placed his talent at the service of the Bolsheviks."

Lunacharsky was born in Poltava in 1875. His father was a liberal-minded government official. When he was still at school Lunacharsky studied Marxist literature and later on he wrote that he read the first volume of *Das Kapital* when he was thirteen. In 1892 he began to give lectures on Marxism to the workers of Kiev. Then followed the life of a professional revolutionary—prison, deportation, exile and the long years of emigration far from his homeland. He took an active part in revolutionary work as a party functionary and publicist. In 1905 Lenin wrote to him saying: "You must work hard for the S. D. (Russian Social-Democratic Party). Don't forget that you have been engaged for a full-time job."

After the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution Lunacharsky was assigned to work on the most difficult of jobs, that of building up a socialist culture. For twelve years he was People's Commissar of Education, devoting his efforts to rallying the intellectuals round the young Soviet Republic.

Lunacharsky saw the victory of socialism as the gate for all the future development of civilization. "I firmly believe," he wrote in 1920, "that the heights that will be attained in art under socialism will surpass all that has previously been created in the world."

Lunacharsky's life ended just when the Soviet people had finished laying the foundations of socialism, when the first joyful fruits of their work were to be seen, when "a living, true, authentic socialism"<sup>1</sup> was becoming reality.

On December 26, 1933, in the French town of Menton, Lunacharsky died. With deep regret the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union announced the death of the "old and honoured Bolshevik revolutionary, one of the most outstanding architects of Soviet socialist culture." Romain Rolland sent a telegram which read: "I am deeply grieved at the death of my friend Lunacharsky who was a most respected ambassador of Soviet thought and culture in the West." To our friends in the West Lunacharsky was indeed an ambassador of Soviet thought and culture.

Studies on literary and artistic problems are by far the most important part of all the work that Lunacharsky left us. He was an outstanding scholar of Russian and West-European literature, and the author of a two-volume work entitled: *The History of West-European Literature at Its Most Important Periods*. His articles on the work of Pushkin, Lermontov, Leo Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Nekrasov, and other Russian classical authors are widely known. He was an exacting and sensitive critic of modern literary trends.

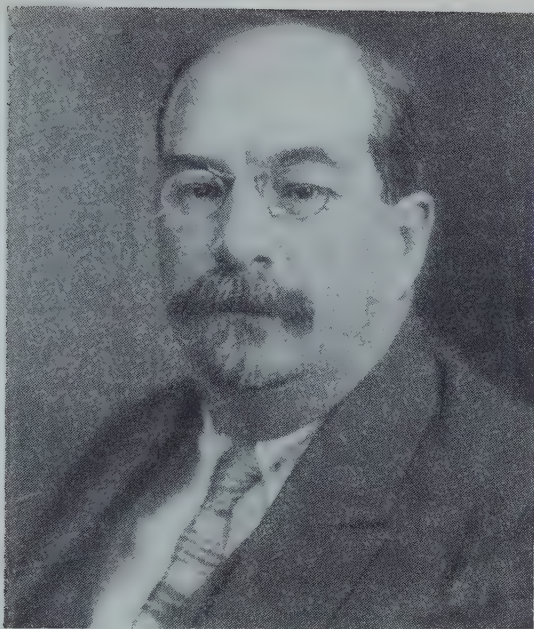
For the first time the work of Gorky and Mayakovsky, the founders of the new literature, was treated with deep understanding in Lunacharsky's essays and articles. His attention was always concentrated on the principles governing the development of literature and the arts, and on the theoretical problems involved. During the thirty-two years of his work as a literary critic Lunacharsky wrote over 1,500 articles which appeared in Russian and foreign publications.

The significance of these articles goes far beyond their purely historical interest, for they contain many valuable assessments, opinions and criticisms which are fully valid today.

Lunacharsky did not hold the same literary and aesthetical opinions at all the periods of his life. He went through years of fruitful work and years of torturing doubts, too, in which he made serious mistakes. But if we look at Lunacharsky's life as a whole, we can use Gorky's famous words: "Onward and Upward!" Onward from the somewhat superficial, academic assimilation of Marxism in the nineties, through the period of overcoming idealistic misconceptions, to active participation in the revolutionary struggle of the working class, to the acceptance of Lenin's philosophical and aesthetic principles and the active participation in building up a new culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Quotation from Mayakovsky.



Anatoli Lunacharsky

Although in the initial period when his aesthetical opinions were maturing Lunacharsky was attracted by idealism and in the reactionary years that followed the 1905 revolution he adhered to anti-Marxist principles, he later radically changed his outlook and became one of the most outstanding and creative propagandists of Marxist aesthetics.

The historical importance of Lunacharsky's work lies in the fact that he was able to apply the principles of revolutionary Marxism to the difficult sphere of culture. His creative personality held an important place in the Pleiad of Russian Marxist critics which existed at the turn of the century, and included Plekhanov, Vorovsky and Olmsky.

As a literary critic Lunacharsky stood out for his ability to respond quickly to the important and complicated tendencies that arose in the literature of his time, to treat them broadly, with brilliance and wit. He learned the great art of dealing creatively with difficult aesthetic problems from such masters of criticism in Russia as Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov, Herzen, and Shchedrin, from such great thinkers as Heine, Victor Hugo, Flaubert and Romain Rolland.

Lunacharsky paid great attention to the question of ideology in art. Denying the existence of classless art Lunacharsky wrote: "The theory that

art stands above classes and is irrational by its nature is also a class theory. To put it bluntly, in their struggle one with the other classes do not only make use of art that has matured into an ideological one; unideological art is also a weapon in the class struggle."

The ideas Lunacharsky held at the more mature period of his life are clearly expressed in his famous article *Lenin and Literary Criticism*. In this article he calls Lenin's teachings on this subject the "most reliable compass" and defends the principle of a militant literature that serves the cause of the socialist reconstruction of the world. "This principle," stressed Lunacharsky, "is at the present time just as vital as the sharp criticism of bourgeois literature in the article (Lenin's—*Ed.*), and the glowing characteristic of socialist literature of the future."

Lunacharsky, following this principle, did much to help Soviet writers find their true path. He repudiated the empty, meaningless vagaries of formalistic experimentation. "The Revolution has absolutely no need for any of this," he wrote in 1924. "It has given life a new and exceptionally deep meaning. Serious literature, which has no reason to go down on all fours and bedeck itself with a gaudy mask, has found new sustenance in the Revolution." These words are still of great significance and today can be addressed to those who persistently try to deprive art of all content, to replace it by the cheap tinsel of "the unexpected," who try to force it "down on all fours."

It is sometimes said that Lunacharsky was attracted by futurism and supported it. However, the facts show that he never harboured any delusions as to the true nature of futuristic "innovations."

While in his article *The Futurists*, written in 1913, he sharply criticized Marinetti and the Russian futurists whom he called "talentless"; he also stressed the importance of such genuine innovators as Walt Whitman and Emile Verhaeren, saying: "I only want to show the contrast between the work of the great innovators, of those who genuinely seek new ways and the noisy ballyhoo and sommersaulting."

His attitude towards futurism as a form of art alien to the proletariat, Lunacharsky voiced both in his article *A Spoon of Antidote* and in his speech at the session of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee in 1920. "Let it be known to all," he said, "that I never was a futurist and never shall. I have written many articles in which I have declared futurism to be one of the channels for advocating bourgeois culture."

As to his attitude to Mayakovsky, it was considerate and enthusiastic, for Lunacharsky understood the futuristic colouring of this great poet's work to be a sort of infantile infatuation with new trends, declaring that Mayakovsky was "not a typical futurist." He added: "If you read his *Man*, *War* or *The Flute-Spined Man* carefully, you will find that under the graces of futurism lies a current of anti-militarism." In another article dealing with the negative influence of futurism on poetry he wrote that "artificiality has even stained the sincere content of the works of such a great poet as Mayakovsky."

He fought to help Mayakovsky free his poetry from all its futuristic trappings. Lecturing at Sverdlov University on February 2, 1929, he said bluntly of the poet: "Mayakovsky is a very great figure, but it would be fine if he could get rid of those trappings."

Lunacharsky wrote four articles on Mayakovsky, apart from his many references to him in other articles and speeches he made on Soviet literature. It was precisely Lunacharsky who was the first to assess the true historical importance of Mayakovsky the innovator, as the bard of the Socialist Revolution.

The critic also did much to assess the historical role played by Maxim Gorky with whom he shared many long years of friendship. Lunacharsky was the man who creatively developed Lenin's appreciation of Gorky as the writer of the proletariat. He wrote: "Behind the big, energetic figure of Maxim Gorky that is so dear to us we can see the giant figure of his co-author, the proletariat, lovingly putting his hand on the shoulder of the man who has become his mouthpiece."

Lunacharsky paid tribute to the importance of Gorky's work for the struggle of the proletariat when he said: "Gorky's exceptional importance lies in the fact that he is the first great writer of the proletariat, that through him this class which is destined, by saving itself, to save all mankind, has for the first time received artistic interpretation, just as it received philosophical and political interpretation through Marx, Engels and Lenin."

In pointing out the significance of Gorky and Mayakovsky and the place they held in the development of literature both in Russia and throughout the world, Lunacharsky gave an attentive and masterly analysis of all the features of their writing, selecting their most important works. His articles *Gorky the Artist* or *Samgin*, for instance, still remain brilliant examples of sensitive and penetrating analysis of Gorky's distinctive writing.

In the latter period of his life, by analyzing the writings of the twenties and thirties Lunacharsky raised and dealt with the important questions of literature and literary criticism. His articles about Furmanov, Panforyov, Trenyov, Esenin, Ilf and Petrov, and many other writers occupy an important place in Soviet literary criticism. He saw and welcomed the successes achieved in Soviet literature and was pleased to write about its progress; but he did not overlook its growing pains and sharply criticized any distortion of the principles that he considered to be the only possible ones for art. They were the principles of realist art. "It must be said," he wrote, "that the art of the proletariat and of those groups rallied round it cannot but be realistic in the main."

He called realism that is bound up with the struggle for socialism and the consolidation of socialism "socialist realism," and he worked out the theory of socialist realism in his last speeches and articles. When you read these articles today you are struck by his deep insight and the keenness of his judgement. He stressed that "our realism is particularly dynamic" and that reality should be understood "as a development, as a movement in the continual conflict of opposites," that the inner structure of socialist realist works is "dictated by an

active understanding of reality." We should remember that these and later opinions were put forward by Lunacharsky before the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, at a time when the foundations of the theory of the new literature were only just being laid.

It was over thirty years ago that Lunacharsky wrote of the varied tasks arising in connection with socialist realism and of the diversity of styles and genres in which it could be expressed. "Socialist realism is a trend which will dominate in the course of a whole epoch (it may even become the characteristic trend in the forms of art of socialist mankind or, as we might say, the definitive and highest form of genuine human art)."

The biting words in which Lunacharsky denounced those who, banking on the difficulties involved in building a new life, tried to sully and slander it, still ring true today. He said: "They will draw up literary reports, take artistic photographs of the back-yard of our Revolution. They will say, like the pig in Krylov's fable, that they rooted around all over the backyard and found nothing worth while there." And he added: "For bourgeois realists it is advantageous to root about in the backyard of the Revolution at a moment when the struggle is particularly sharp, when the construction has not yet been completed, when there are still many waste sites, many unfinished buildings, and all kinds of rubbish lying about. They take all this statically, at its face value. Imagine that you are putting up a building that, when finished, will be a great palace. But it is still half-built, and you draw it in this state and say: 'There's your socialism. It hasn't even got a roof!' Of course, you would be a realist and what you said would be true: but it is clear straight away that this truth is in reality a falsehood. Only he who understands what kind of a building is going up and how it is going up, only he who understands that it *will* have a roof can tell the socialist truth. If someone does not understand the development he will never be able to see the truth because truth is not a thing in itself, it does not remain static; truth flies on, truth is development, truth is conflict, truth is struggle, truth is the morrow and we have to see it as such; he who does not see it like this is a bourgeois realist and therefore a pessimist, a grouser and frequently a knave and a false witness."

Considering socialist realist art to be the "most powerful long-range gun," Lunacharsky sought to take correct aim and level the gun on the burning questions of the day. He was merciless to those who stubbornly clung to Flaubert's incorrect opinion that "truth never lies in the present: he who clings to it will perish." "It is obvious, however, that Flaubert's opinion is erroneous," wrote Lunacharsky. "Superficiality can never be durable, no matter whether topical problems are concerned or an attempt is made at treating any of the eternal themes. All that is profound and significant will have a lasting value, but modernity that lacks in significance cuts a miserable figure. A particularly sorry sight would be cut by our contemporary who could not find anything profound and significant in the reality of our times."

In his work as a critic Lunacharsky considered that the main thing was to help writers "to find a foothold in reality" and to direct them towards all that

is of deep significance in the life of the times. "The whole meaning of our socialist work is to build a life that will enable us to develop all the possibilities that lie latent in man, that will mould a man who will be ten times more intelligent, happy, beautiful and rich than ever before. Now we are engaged in building a better life. We are going from worse to better, we cannot see the end or the limit of this construction, but we are finishing the first link in the chain now." We should also mention here the part Lunacharsky played in developing contacts and mutual understanding between the representatives of the young Soviet culture and those of progressive culture in the West. His appeal "for mutual contacts among the men of letters of the world" rang out at a moment when such contacts were still very few, when our country and its art were restricted to the single island of the socialist world.

He realized that "both in the West and the East there are honest writers who speak (sometimes with horror) of the ugliness created by the bourgeois way of life. Often they draw no conclusion from this, but their piercing gaze and artistic ability to reflect reality make their works useful."

He recognized such writers, welcomed them, wrote about them and analyzed their work. "Anatole France has turned to socialism and even to communism in his old age," he wrote, "because he felt that the ruling class was becoming vulgar and stupid and that in its hands human culture was heading for ruin. Not long ago we saw the most cultured man of our times, Romain Rolland, who was for long one of the advocates of non-resistance to evil, solemnly declare that he is going over to the camp of the active revolutionaries, in order to save human culture from the disastrous clutches of capitalism. We have seen the most cultured man in Britain, Bernard Shaw, declare that if the hopes of the immortal Lenin and his followers of building a new world deceived him, then he would shut his eyes in despair for the people of the future."

Not all Lunacharsky's predictions about the development of European culture proved correct, but he was right in the fundamentals, in his belief in the bright forces of progressive art abroad and in his belief that such art would inevitably triumph.

Finally, it must be said that the rich and diverse substance of Lunacharsky's critical work was expressed in a form worthy of it. His scholarly articles, his passionate pamphlets, rousing speeches and literary portraits, his ironic praise, good-hearted mockery, inspiring appeals—all this went to make up the personality of Lunacharsky the critic. His amazing knowledge of the latent beauties of the Russian language, his ability to create artistic verbal images of great force and clarity—such were the qualities inherent in his work.

His gifts were shown with particular brilliance in his speeches. I recall his concluding speech to the bicentennial anniversary meeting of the Academy of Sciences attended by many foreign scientists: he began in Russian, continued in German, French, Italian and English, finishing up in Latin.

His encyclopaedic knowledge, his great learning, his whole being, he dedicated to the building up of a new, socialist culture.

## SAMGIN

(A Chapter from a Study of Gorky's Novel The Life of Klim Samgin)

**K**LIM SAMGIN is above all else and in the fullest sense of the term a *literary type*. Just what does that mean? To create a literary type of artistic value is to observe certain positive or negative traits or combinations of traits that are widely prevalent in real life and weave them into a single character as like as possible to human beings of the same type, except that the specific combination the author is interested in is brought out in stronger relief.

But that is not all. Aided by intuition and by his knowledge, an author may have distinguished certain traits in real life and then skilfully synthesized them into a single character, but that character is bound to betray its mechanical origin: it will be a puppet, perhaps an unusually well-made one, very like a living being, a very amusing or very instructive puppet, but nothing more.

Art, however, can do much more than that. And it does do more when the author's talent permits him to imagine and create a distinct personality, that is, an individual as peculiarly unique as any living person, and to do so in such a manner that, far from being overshadowed, the broadly typical traits find their natural complement, their dynamic consummation in the purely individual traits.

Many outstanding literary characters and nearly all the great ones are so constructed. The author brings forth into the world a new personality, a wholly plastic, fully alive individual, and the viability of such a personality, such an individual type, is greater than that of most real persons: men get born and die, while an Oedipus or a Hamlet lives for centuries without aging. That is how Klim Samgin, too, is constructed. He is a living person.

In his wonderful letter about *Frau von Sickingen*, Karl Marx reproaches Lassalle for "Schillerizing" instead of "Shakespearizing" his characters. Schiller's characters, he explains, are the bearers of definite tendencies. I think no one will deny that Marx saw Shakespeare's characters as truly living, many-faceted individuals. This ability of Shakespeare's is widely recognized; we need only remember Pushkin's comments.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pushkin writes: "Unlike Molière's, Shakespeare's characters don't typify some passion or some vice; they are living beings with many passions and many vices; with changing circumstances their varied and many-faceted characters are developed before the spectator's eyes."

That at the same time Marx chides Lassalle for—and this is his main point—not giving sufficient attention to the class point of view in drawing his characters only accentuates his underlying thought: one cannot create living characters by proceeding from ideas and creating types to bear those ideas, whereas by proceeding from classes and striving to create full-blooded spokesmen of those classes one can “approximate” Shakespeare.

And so, Samgin is, in our opinion, a literary character in the fullest sense of the term, and, moreover, one representative of a class.

Let it not be thought that characters must necessarily represent some class as a whole. The major classes are few, but they fall into numerous groups. In every given period a class may be said to consist of a certain number of basic types. To discern and describe these types in their relations with each other and with other classes is the main task of the novelist.

The fact that a class or group—in this case the intelligentsia, that is, that part of the petty bourgeoisie that lives by “mental” labour—can be charged with the prevalence among it of the Samgin type, with the presence of a greater or lesser particle of Samgin in very many of its representatives—that fact is, of course, an indictment.

But it is, firstly, an exceedingly just indictment.

And secondly, it is a highly useful indictment.

First of all, however, just what does Klim Samgin stand for? As was said earlier in this study, as a lifelike literary type Klim Samgin possesses numerous individual traits, that is, non-typical traits that are his alone. His artistic sense permits the author to select those individual traits so that they do not conflict with the character as a whole but merely complement the typical traits.

Leaving aside the question of whether this type of creation is a purely intellectual process or one that is in some measure intuitive, although nonetheless rational and purposeful, let me say only that some of our critics have gone altogether too far in their support of the thesis that artistic creation is a purely intellectual process. As they fear the devil, so they fear to admit the operation of artistic imagination of a non-intellectual order.

This will, beyond a doubt, yet be the subject of many debates. But for the time being, I repeat, I shall leave aside the question of whether Gorky, like an engineer designing some machine, could say exactly how he constructed the intricate figure of Samgin.

Like every individual, our “hero” has a name. The purely intellectual author invents names to define the character of his personages: Pravdin, Molchalín, etc.<sup>1</sup> Very often an author names his characters haphazardly, simply choosing some common name. The subtlest method of naming a significant character is hard to define: it consists in a vague but deeply felt harmony between the character and the name. Russian literature offers plenty of examples, but I shall not stop to list them.

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<sup>1</sup> Characters from Russian comedies by Fonvizin (1744-1792) and Griboyedov (1795-1829), respectively. Their names might be translated as “Truebody” and “Silent.”

Our "hero" bears an entirely individual name—have you ever met another Klim Samgin anywhere?—but one that suits him perfectly. There is something pretentious about it and at the same time it carries emotional colour.

The sound of the name Klim brings to my mind a picture of someone like Dobuzhinsky's<sup>1</sup> *Man in Glasses*. But this Klim is not only a similarly narrow, similarly blind, similarly artificial and dull creature. He is also *Samgin*: he holds his head high with a sense of his own dignity, there is something about him—in his collars and ties, in his way of wearing his hair, for all their cold correctness—that lays claim to an individual style and, I would say, a restrained artistry. He is not tall, but always holds himself stiffly erect to seem taller. His speech is dry both in manner and tone, fundamentally boring and somehow needless, though very pretentious; he has the ready tongue of the lawyer and likes to hear himself talk.

That is the external man, and that figure really could not be called anything but *Klim Samgin*.

Samgin has his own individual family, his own individual childhood, his own more or less individual path in life. He has his own individual love affairs. But these profoundly individual elements pave the way for and bring to light what is basic in him.

There is no reason for us to stop in this particular critical analysis on these individual traits. Let us proceed, instead, to the essential substance of Samgin, to what is typical in him.

As said earlier, Samgin is an empty creature who covers his hollowness with a mask of phantom life. This shadowy quality of his deceives others, of course, but it also deceives Samgin himself. Although he is certain that he is real, there are nevertheless moments when he recognizes his nullity.

What is the sociological explanation of this hollowness, in some cases complete, in others partial, among a considerable section of our intelligentsia?

In the first place, there is the extra-class or non-class position of the intelligentsia. Their "leaders" boast of this as something that places them above all classes. In reality, it merely places them in a vacuum. But of course, not all of them. The better part of the intelligentsia, usually those who stem from the non-privileged classes, go over to the side of the working people (in Chernyshevsky's time they went over to the peasantry, in Lenin's time to the proletariat). Another section chooses to serve the upper classes—some, the bureaucratic state, others, capital.

But in both sections we can observe a *partial* hollowness. The revolutionary intellectual is subject to doubts and regrets, time and again he looks back in uncertainty; in brief, he lacks wholeness. This is even more true of the deserters to the side of the upper classes. Their conscience troubles them and to still its pangs they are fond of talking about their "duality."

The most complete hollowness, however, is to be observed among those intellectuals who, in face of the existence of two (or more) conflicting camps,

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<sup>1</sup> Russian artist (1875-1957).

decline to join either of them as fighters, but assume the role of chance guests, or else set themselves up as "independents" and do not visit either camp even as guests. These have no historical future, no principles, no programme.

When a man of this sort is stupid and uneducated we say: "a coarse philistine" and give him up as hopeless. But if, like Klim Samgin, he is able and well-educated, he will invariably try to prove that he is politically, morally, and culturally alive and active, and then the hollow core of him will stand revealed.

A salient characteristic of the Samgins is what German psychiatrists call *Geltungsdrang*, the wish to be of consequence, to be ever in the limelight.

There is a fine distinction here: men who wish to appear of greater consequence than they really are may yet be sincerely desirous of doing some sort of useful work; such men may be described as realistically ambitious.

Tolstoy put it very neatly when he once said that a man's worth may be expressed by a fraction, with his real merits as the numerator and his opinion of himself as the denominator. When this fraction is of an unfavourable nature, the realistically ambitious men are hard to bear because they are for ever thrusting themselves forward in matters beyond their ability. But ever so much more unbearable are those who may be described as decoratively ambitious: what matters to them is not *consequence* but being in the *limelight*. They may know in their heart of hearts that their resplendent costume is merely tinfoil and tinsel, that the "role" they play in society is a futile one, but that does not matter to them as long as it is one that brings them attention.

Of course, there are plenty of individualists among the intellectuals who fight hard for their career, for their "place," and fight with worthy weapons, that is, by the work they do. They sometimes betray absurd little traits of idle ambition but that is not important. For all their faults, in their case Tolstoy's fraction is of a favourable nature.

Yes, there are many realistically ambitious men among the intelligentsia and still more who are decoratively ambitious. Why are there so many of them? Because nearly all the intellectual professions are of the kind where success (earnings, reputation, fame, etc.) depends on purely individual qualities, on originality, or on talent. People go to the lawyer, the doctor, the portrait painter, or invite the actor or the musician who is supreme in his profession. If he can easily be equalled his value is nil. If it is harder to equal him he can command a rouble. He who cannot be equalled is free to name any price he likes. That is why nearly every intellectual wants to be supreme in his field. And not only for the sake of the salary involved; there are also the considerations of public attention, success with women, and the like.

That is why, being no more than an empty cipher and merely wearing a mask of life, the Samgins try to paint that mask in the most original manner they can. Samginism is, first of all, the desire to be unique, unlike anyone else.

Incidentally, it is around this desire, but with no adequate opportunities of fulfilment, that Ibsen's remarkable drama *Peer Gynt* is built.

To this we must add one more sociological factor of the greatest importance: the intellectual of the type we are discussing, that is, who deliberately sets himself "above parties," stands, as it were, at the crossroads of ideas and trends. Since he himself is an empty person, these ideas pour into him freely. Sometimes they take possession of him one after the other, alternately, and then we have before us the chameleon type; sometimes they live in him side by side, and then we have before us the eclectic type.

Samgin is exceedingly anxious to be original. Being incapable of producing original ideas of any weight, he sometimes realizes in despair that all his inflated originality is no more than a dummy stuffed with borrowed scraps.

In general, when he enters a brightly lit drawing room filled with fluent conversationalists and, to borrow Igor Severyanin's<sup>1</sup> term, "stimulating female society," Samgin is impelled to ruffle his feathers and swagger a little, but when he remains alone with himself he is often like a toy clown whose spring has run down: his shoulders droop, he puckers his face, he wipes his glasses with an angular gesture, blinks his colourless eyes and thinks grievous things about himself.

During one such interlude Gorky's Samgin reasons very soberly. Lying in bed one night, he recalls the words of the red-headed philosopher Tomilin<sup>2</sup>: "On most people a profusion of impressions has a destructive effect; it clogs their moral sense. Yet the same wealth of impressions makes some men exceptionally interesting persons." "Klim," writes Gorky, "found something both frightening and alluring in these words of his red-headed teacher. It seemed to him that he was already overburdened with experience, but sometimes he felt that all the impressions, all the thoughts he had accumulated were of no use to him. Nothing in them had really touched him to the core so that he could call it his *own personal* conclusion or belief. They all lived in him as though *against his will*, and not deep down in him but somewhere just under his skin; deeper down there was only a vacuum that waited to be filled with something else. This sense of disparity and hostility between himself as a vessel and his contents came to Klim more and more often and disturbingly. He envied Kutuzov<sup>3</sup> who had learned to believe and was tranquilly preaching his beliefs."

What was it that escaped Samgin? What spring was lacking in him?

He could not understand that a diversity of impressions, views and ideas can be transformed into a system and wrought into an excellent guide to action only if they are centred around a few *dominating* ideas and feelings. And the dominant chord is determined by character, which in its turn is to be found primarily among the representatives of the most clearly defined and compact classes and groups. Among that section of the intelligentsia which stands "outside all classes" lack of character is only to be expected. Samgin has no *dominant chord*.

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<sup>1</sup> Russian poet of the decadent school (1887-1941).

<sup>2</sup> Samgin's teacher.

<sup>3</sup> A character in the novel, a Bolshevik revolutionary.

This pitiful creature sometimes knows deep mental suffering, experiences intricate emotional dramas. But often at the very moment when he thinks with pride of his "complexity," the bitter thought crosses his mind that nevertheless he has no compass to show him the way.

Gorky gives a fine description of this state of inner anxiety in one of Samgin's "monologues":

"I'm not tied up with anyone or anything," he reminded himself. 'Life is hostile to me. I walk above it as on a tightrope.' The comparison with a tightrope walker came as an unpleasant surprise. 'I've no regrets,' he repeated half-questioningly, examining his thoughts as though from afar and with the eyes of some new thought not yet formulated in words. That his old thoughts should be under the observation of some new one which, though vague, might well be the strongest of them all, gave Samgin *a pleasant sense of his own intricacy and uniqueness* (my italics—A. L.), a sense of inner richness. As he stood smoking in the middle of the room, looking down at the rosy spot of light at his feet, he suddenly recalled the Eastern parable of the man who sat weeping bitterly in the sun at the intersection of two roads and when asked why, answered: 'My shadow has hidden from me and only it knew which road to take.' In the parable the tearful man was called a fool."

And now let us go on to other roots and flowers of Samginism.

The intelligentsia is a group of the petty bourgeoisie. In other words, it does not own capital, it sells its labour. But whom could it sell it to then? And for a good price, so as to live comfortably and support a family? Obviously, to the propertied. Some chose to serve the government, and what the government was like we all know; others chose to serve the wealthy. With rare exceptions, those who did not manage to do so or declined to, remained poor.

In most cases, this class pressure finds some counter-pressure within the intellectual. His sense of decency often tells him that working for the benefit of the exploiters is an odious thing to do. A profession, any profession, it may be said, in itself impels its possessor, if only he stops to consider its aims deeply and honestly, to very radical conclusions. Strictly speaking, an absolutely honest doctor, teacher, artist, etc., cannot but be a socialist.

Intellectuals who have in one way or another preserved their purity to a greater or lesser extent carry a certain amount of moral weight. It is not so easy to disregard their opinions. Their disapproval wounds, or at the least, pricks one painfully.

This was most certainly to be observed in the old Russia too. The educated section, the intellectuals who sprang from the non-privileged classes, whose existence was in some measure called forth by the government when it adapted itself to the needs of capital, were at once made subject to police surveillance. Fear of the omniscient government bodies—the gendarmerie, the secret police—was most widespread among the intelligentsia. Nor could it have been otherwise. Could not those forces wear a man out and destroy him on the mere

suspicion of his implication in the revolutionary movement? To name only the most famous martyrs of this fear of the government, only the prominent representatives of Russian thought and art would add up to a voluminous martyrology.

Of course, this did not stop the intelligentsia from producing heroes from its midst, but you will remember that Nekrasov called them "the troops who *die* for the great cause of love."

The Samgins, on the contrary, are men who do not want to die for any cause whatever. They are terribly afraid of the police, so much so that under certain circumstances the latter can even tame them to do their bidding. Circumstances once struck Klim Samgin up against the police like a match. It was his good fortune that they did not persevere in his case or the match would have flared up in a malodorous, sulphurous flame of provocation. Even so there were many times when Samgin approached the very threshold of treachery and even thievishly crossed it.

In Russia the best section of the intelligentsia, the section which went over to the side of the peasants or, later, the workers, met police pressure with an enormous counter-pressure. Not only did the brand of traitor, pressed in by the hand of the progressive intelligentsia, burn as deep as the brand of Cain; the charge of indifference towards the revolution, of colourless philistinism was enough in itself to worry even cowards into donating money to the revolutionaries, into placing apartments at their disposal, expressing sympathy and sometimes co-operating with them indirectly.

Of course, this sort of fence-straddling, this wary treading between two terrifying millstones, made for duplicity and a painful cleavage of personality. Gorky repeatedly notes these traits in Samgin. Take this passage:

"Samgin had an antipathy to Jews but *knowing that this feeling was shameful* (my italics—A. L.), he, like many others, concealed it behind a set of phrases called philosemitism. He felt that the Jew was more alien to him than a German or a Finn, and he suspected in each member of the race an inordinate perspicacity that allowed him to perceive more distinctly than did members of other races the patent and secret faults he, a Russian, was guilty of. Realizing how tragic was the lot of Jewry in Russia, he thought that the Jewish mentality must be infected by and charged with an innate hatred for Russians and a desire to avenge all the insults and suffering the Jews were subjected to."

There is one more very common, revealing feature of Samginism. A good part of the "work" done by the intelligentsia—and work well-paid for, at that—is wholly phantasmal. Intellectuals engaged in such work who have any intelligence and conscience at all recognize its utter futility and that brings them to an awareness of their own social unsubstantiality. But even those who honestly consider themselves useful, although in reality they are merely beating the air, pouring water into a sieve, are objectively phantoms as far as their true social usefulness is concerned. This does not keep some of them from costing society very dear; their greed is by no means phantasmal.

The government offices were crowded with idlers of the kind described in part in *The Tashkenters*<sup>1</sup> and in general often the butts of the caustic wit of the great satirists. They were like a swarm of mosquitoes, the idle prattlers engaged in so-called public activity. And add to them the different kinds of parasites who catered to the extravagant whims of the richest groups, all the chefs who concocted unimaginable dishes for gourmands, or the architects who built mansions in the "Lisbon style" for high-ranking vulgarians, all the servitors, entertainers and prostitutes, male and female, who fed upon the superabundance of the freebooters in return for entertaining them—they were all, of course, utterly useless people, a drain on society.

However, all these elements belong to the intelligentsia. They are either artists or craftsmen of some sort, experts, specialists of different kinds. They either have talent or a diploma, they make good money and quite a few of them are even famed.

Klim Samgin, it must be said, belongs to just this category. He is something of a lawyer and something of a writer. If he were to be called an idler he would certainly feel insulted. He works and he seeks work. But at no time of his "life" will you find any trace of useful work, unless you count the few unpaid for items he wrote at Spivak's request.<sup>2</sup>

The number of people who found themselves hard put to it to answer the stern question posed by the truly democratic revolution of the working people—what are you doing, what are you capable of?—was exceedingly large among the intelligentsia.

In the first place, the revolution shatters the golden calf by dancing around which these economic phantoms earn their living. In the second place, it dispels all the mists that veil the futility of one idle occupation or another.

That is why the Samgins instinctively hate the revolution. Or rather, they would be prepared to accept a revolution that would allow absurd luxury and all kinds of idle prattling to go on existing. After such a revolution some phantoms would rise to even higher positions and find a wider arena for their useless activity. Klim Samgin, for instance, seriously considers becoming a member of parliament in the event of such a revolution, to which his wife Varvara, who has learned to see through him, retorts in a moment of irritation: "You want to be a member of parliament, do you? Well, let me tell you, you won't make a career; you haven't got the brains for it. . . ."

I think I have now presented sufficient proof of the justice of Gorky's charge of Samginism against a considerable section of the intelligentsia, against a specific widespread element among them.

It should be clear to the reader that Samginism is not an accidental thing. On the contrary, all its most typical elements are determined, it may be said, by practically the main forms of the intelligentsia's social being.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Tashkenters*, a book by Saltykov-Shchedrin satirizing the "Tashkenter" as the personification of the rapacity, cupidity, and unscrupulousness of the members of the ruling classes.

<sup>2</sup> A woman-Bolshevik in the novel.

We said earlier that Gorky's charge was not only just but *useful*. That usefulness should now be apparent, I think. Pure, thorough-going Samginism must be destroyed, but for that we must first learn to recognize it when we see it. And one of the major forms of social cognition is artistic cognition.

I have heard it said that Gorky once thought to have Samgin disappear symbolically in the beams of searchlights projected from the armoured car on which Lenin drove into the future Leningrad.<sup>1</sup> I have also heard of the suggestions to continue with the story of Samgin and show him as having pretended to accept the Soviet power and become a saboteur.

Beyond a doubt, Samgin shared a good deal of the psychology of the saboteurs, as brought to light during the well-known trials<sup>2</sup>. But let us assume that sabotage and subversion have been stopped. Could we say then that Samginism too has been wiped out?

No! Samginism is more subtle, more volatile. It will be more or less easy to deal with the thorough-going variety; to deal with partial Samginism, with a Samginism that, like a germ, has invaded an otherwise sound nature, will be more difficult. In such cases the literary portrait of Samgin will often be of direct help to us.

A person of good, sound character, on the verge of indulging in idle talk or idle activity, will remember Klim Samgin and stop to ask himself: "Won't I be acting like that worthy gentleman?" And, recognizing the resemblance, he will exclaim in horror: "My God, the devil nearly got me that time!" In such cases it will be sufficient to say to the tenuous imp Samgin: "Get thee gone," and he will indeed vanish into thin air.

This concludes my analysis of Samgin. I have now answered the first question the reader and I put. It should be clear now why Samgin, so uninteresting a person in himself, was yet an exceedingly interesting "hero" to Gorky, inasmuch as his last novel was somewhat of a *Bildungsroman*. We watch Samgin grow in it from a child into what might be described as flowering emptiness.

Let me now show you that the basic elements of our analysis do indeed coincide in full with the underlying idea of Gorky's portrait of his "hero." I quote Samgin's remarkable dream in illustration:

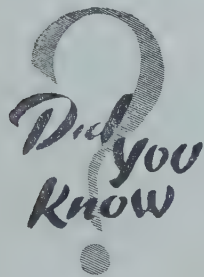
"With the lightning rapidity possible only in dreams, Samgin saw himself walking along a deserted, well-trodden road lined with old birches. Beside him trudged another Klim Samgin. It was a bright day and the sun warmed his back but neither he, nor his double, nor the trees had shadows, and that made him very uneasy. His double walked silently but kept shouldering him into the ruts and ditches or up against the trees. This was so annoying that at last Klim pushed back, and then his double dropped to the ground, embraced Klim's legs and began to scream wildly. To prevent himself from being pulled down with him, Samgin seized his companion and raised him to his feet, discovering then that

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<sup>1</sup> Lunacharsky's essay appeared in 1932; the fourth volume of *The Life of Klim Samgin* appeared in 1937.

<sup>2</sup> Trials of saboteurs (1928) in Donbas.

he had no more weight than a shadow. But he was dressed exactly like the real, living Samgin and should therefore by all means have had some weight! Samgin lifted him high and dashed him to the ground. He broke into pieces and at once there sprang up around Samgin dozens of figures that ran along swiftly by his side. And although they were as imponderable and translucent as shadows, they crowded and jostled him terribly, turning him off the road and driving him on. More and more of them sprang up, all of them hot, and Samgin felt stifled amidst the silent throng of them. He thrust them away, trampled on them, rent them with his hands and as he held them they burst like soap bubbles. For an instant Samgin felt victorious, but the next moment his doubles had multiplied beyond count and surrounded him again and were driving him through shadowless space to a smoky sky."



That there are frescoes at the Blagoveshchensky (Annunciation) Cathedral of the Moscow Kremlin, depicting various historical figures—Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, etc.?

It would be useless to hunt for portraiture hallmarks in the figures exhibited; they are the products of their authors' imagination. But the inscriptions accompanying them do not leave the shadow of a doubt as to whom the painters had in mind. Homer, with a wreath on his head and a fluttering cloak over his shoulders, holds a scroll prophesying the coming of the Saviour; Virgil is presented in the garments of a Russian prince of yore, and with a hat on his head.

These frescoes, in the main, were painted in 1564. They bear witness to the wide popularity of antique writers in 16th-century Russia.

## A LITTLE BOY IN A BIG WORLD

WHEN the October Revolution quickened the latent constructive energies of the Russian village and gave release to its talents, the beneficent effects extended to literature too. Its ranks were reinforced by a new generation of writers springing directly from the peasantry, who, while drawing on all the best that Russian literature had to offer in the way of descriptions of peasant life, on the traditions of Ivan Turgenev, Nikolai Nekrasov, Leo Tolstoy, Gleb Uspensky, and Vladimir Korolenko, brought with it a new note of close relationship with the village.

In one way or another every one of the Russian classics touched on the problems presented by peasant life. The theme of the land, of the muzhik, was basic to 19th-century Russian literature. As an agrarian country, feudal Russia for many years put the most pressing, vital problems before its writers, problems they were bound to give serious thought to if they wanted their work to amount to anything.

Since those times the country has changed beyond recognition, but the theme of village life still figures prominently in its literature, in the work of modern Soviet writers. And naturally enough, in their desire to show the sources of the immense energy of the Revolution and of the deep-going changes wrought in the countryside since, many writers go back to the past.

The old village of pre-Revolution period has been described by Mikhail Sholokhov, Fyodor Gladkov, Fyodor Panforyov, and many other eminent Soviet writers whose books have contributed much to our understanding of the new Soviet village, of the contemporary Soviet peasant, the collective farmer. I want here to dwell especially on a recent book, *Discovery of the World* by Vasili Smirnov. Its author has many new things to say about the old Russian village, but the important thing is not so much the new material he presents, as the new view of the village he and other Soviet writers have brought with them.

*Discovery of the World* is a novel about a village boy whose thinking life begins at the time of the First World War and the October Revolution.

The first two books (there are to be four in all) depict the village prior to and during the First World War.<sup>1</sup>

Like most books about childhood, this novel is largely autobiographical, but not only. It was conceived by the author as the story of his contemporaries. The experience of the Soviet system and of Party work in the countryside, the experience of collective-farm life engendered in him an irresistible urge to give fresh thought to the theme of the peasantry, to depict the Russian village as

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<sup>1</sup> Chapters from the first book were published in *Soviet Literature*, issue No. 3, 1956.

he himself, a man of the new Soviet formation, sees it. He starts out with the Russian village after 1905, the village he knew intimately and loved.

The central character is six-year-old Shurka Sokolov—skinny, tow-headed, barefoot Shurka—a living little *person* endowed with all the distinctive traits of his class, his time, and of the national character. This little Volga village lad feels at home on this earth, and easily establishes contact with Nature and his fellow-beings. Young as he is, he is already a definite personality, an active little body whose life cannot be said to be bare of impressions and reflection.

Never does the author place his little hero in uncommon circumstances; in no way does he put him above the other village boys. He experiences the same sorrows and the same joys as the others. Yet from practically the very first page the reader divines in Shurka the richness of spirit which makes him the central figure of the story. All that the author himself knows and thinks about the village comes to a focus in him.

## 2

The first picture we are given of the pre-Revolution village is the familiar one of the cramped quarters of a small hut. Behind a thin partition a cradle with a sleeping baby hangs from the ceiling. From it extends a rope looped at the other end around the bare foot of the "nanny." The "nanny" is, of course, little Shurka, who sits perched on the window-sill tracing designs on the pane. Big drops of rain trickle down the cold, uneven glass, the wind blows through the cracks of the rotting frame, a loose plank taps monotonously on the roof. It is the cold, wet weather of early spring, with the wind shaking the bare branches of the lime-trees, last year's faded grass showing around the well, the muddy black roads, the raindrops dotting the puddles with bursting bubbles. Indoors it is dark, the kerosene in the lamp is giving out and Shurka's mother is saving it for later. The humpbacked table and the bandy-legged stool and Mother's battered shoes and the simple toys on the floor—stones, bits of glass, chocks of wood, a tin soldier with only one leg—all speak of poverty. Yet even in this first chapter, which is called "Evening" and opens with the words: "Shurka felt sad," the impression created is far from depressing.

In this little person who is chilled through and through but stubbornly remains on the sill to keep staring out screw-eyed at the dark street, nagging incessantly: "Mamma, may I howl?" until at last he wins his mother's irritated permission, and then begins to howl up and down the scale with the keenest of pleasure—in this little person we at once recognize so persistent a demand for joy, so keen a zest for life, so strong an affirmation of the human right to happiness, that a smile of tender amusement comes to our lips and we begin to feel at home in this poor hut on this rainy evening.

That is how we first meet Smirnov's little hero, the little muzhik who has yet to "discover the world" for himself. From then on, through two volumes, Shurka leads us after him over all the paths of his childhood, through the village and the woods and along the banks of the Volga, revealing himself to us in full

and growing before our very eyes. And we follow him willingly, because in some way he has won our hearts.

Though the story is told in the third person, which gives the author greater freedom, allowing him to look at Shurka from a distance and thus portray him more objectively, Smirnov has assumed the right to express his little hero's feelings and thoughts as his own, with the result that there are many intimate "monologues" in the book in which author and hero are indivisible. It is as though there were two Shurkas—big Shurka and little Shurka.

Side by side with the "boyish" line of his hero, which Smirnov develops with a sure hand, submerging himself in Shurka's actions and thoughts, there runs—now merging with it, now drawing apart from it—the distinct line of a keen-eyed, discerning realist artist who knows just what he wants to show.

This combination of inner and outer, of the subjective sensations of his characters and an objective knowledge of life and of the historical situation, which makes for unusually full and lifelike portrayal, is cemented by the unified view of the world, displayed throughout.

Shurka is attracted to people of well-integrated character, who say and think and do what they want to. One of this "square sort who doesn't fool you" is, in Shurka's opinion, Uncle Rodion, the father of his friend Yashka. Rodion seems to know something of vital importance about life. He never bothers to tell lies but says what he thinks straight out. And though his straightforward words and glance were disconcerting to all the others, Shurka felt that they all respected him. Rodion had an unusually strong sense of justice that compelled him always to be seeking the truth. Even when dealing with children he spoke the truth, though often enough it was over their heads.

"Are all people cruel?" Shurka asked him after observing a drunken muzhik beat up his grown sons.

"Rodion thought a moment before answering.

"It's not people, Shurka, it's life that's cruel."

"Why?"

"The people are poor, life's hard for them."

"What about you, are you cruel?"

"Awfully!" laughed Uncle Rodion and, growling comically, began to tickle and squeeze Shurka."

Uncle Rodion was one of Shurka's first guides and assistants in the adventure of discovering the world. You could go to him with any question you liked, he wouldn't brush you aside or send you packing, as Mother did sometimes. True, he answered jestingly, but very often those answers contained a deep meaning that set little heads working. As drawn by the author, Rodion is a man of great charm, a man pure and sound of body and mind, to whom children's souls can safely be entrusted. Such men are commonly called in Russia a "gift to children," as Belinsky put it. Of all the different types of peasants portrayed in the book, Uncle Rodion is the one Shurka likes best.

Shurka's second "teacher" was the shepherd Smorchok. The poorest man in the village, short and homely and curiously colourless, Smorchok enjoyed public

attention and a measure of importance only once a year, in the spring, when with his long whip over his shoulder he went piping through the village to collect all the cattle together and drive them out to pasture. On ordinary days he was a nonentity and when he and his son went around from hut to hut collecting his payment in money and food, he bowed timidly as though he were begging for alms. But out in the fields and meadows, amidst the herd, he had a dignity of his own and seemed to Shurka to be a mysterious being, a magician, who knew things beyond the ken of ordinary mortals. Shurka suspected that "under his cap, somewhere on the back of his neck or hidden among his hair, Smorchok had a secret eye, or perhaps even several," for he could see and hear the life of Nature and was always marvelling at her beauty.

"He'd see some worthless flower like a dandelion or a blade of grass that had been tickling his nose all the morning and making him sneeze without his paying it the least attention, and now suddenly he'd turn on his side and examine it with eyebrows raised in wonder. He'd never pick it, only touch it gently with his hairy fingers, drawing the stalk towards him to stroke it and blow on it before letting it go again.

"At times he would lie staring up at the sky in silence for a long time and then pointing out a cloud overhead exclaim to himself:

"Why, it's beautiful!"

"Actually there'd be nothing beautiful about it—just an ordinary white cloud drifting in the sky."

The above passage is a typical one for *Discovery of the World*, for it proceeds along two planes: the one reflecting as in a mirror everything the child sees, the other revealing the more deeply hidden, uneven course of Shurka's thoughts and guesses and discoveries.

Shurka is a very observant boy, observant as a child is: he notes very accurately everything the shepherd does. At the same time he tries very hard to see the world through his friend's eyes, to perceive the beauty apparent to him and take joy in the things he does. And, of course, his efforts are not in vain.

So it happens that the "ineffectual" Smorchok teaches Shurka to love Nature and beauty, to let his spirit soar aloft in what is called fantasy or imagination and what for the Russian is directly bound up with questions of moral value.

### 3

The healthy optimism, the spiritual strength with which his hero goes out to discover the world are shown by Smirnov to be rooted primarily in Shurka's home life.

The peasant family the author portrays is of the good, friendly, healthy kind that is so important for laying the physical and moral foundations which determine a person's behaviour in later life. In this regard he has indeed contributed something new, for hitherto writers have generally started their pictures of the "leaden ugliness" in life with the family—and real life, it must be admitted, provided ample material for this. From their earliest days children really

did come to know poverty and back-breaking toil, witness and themselves suffer from dark ignorance and drunkenness, stupidity and savage beatings, and it therefore seemed as though this must be the best way to depict the Russian countryside of tsarist times.

Many Soviet writers have shown us despotically ruled peasant families of pre-war, pre-Revolution times, families in which children counted for nothing and dared not open their mouths in the presence of their elders. In Fyodor Gladkov's autobiographical trilogy this despotism is made ten times more oppressive by the strictness with which the Old Believers adhered to their religious ritual<sup>1</sup>.

And yet there can be no doubt that there were also good, closely-knit, hard-working families and that it was these that contributed to the formation of the positive Russian character without which the nation could not conceivably have accomplished a social and cultural revolution such as the world had never seen before; it was they who contributed to the formation of the popular forces which made it possible to withstand a long chain of wars, economic ruin and famine and still build a new life and advance towards communism.

Smirnov presents many different families in his book—he does not conceal from the reader the things that were wrong in the countryside—but he has placed in the forefront the family of Shurka Sokolov, a family typical of the good. Shurka's is a small family, consisting only of his father, mother, himself and his younger brother. In the winter his father goes away to the city to work as a stove-setter. In the summer he comes back to work on the land. He is good at either job, for he takes pleasure in his work. The chapter describing the haymaking ("High Summer") is one of the best in the book. It brings out the exhilarating joy and poetry of team-work on the land. Shurka's mother worked gayly. It was as though she had come to life with his father's return. And his father, who had grown morose in the city in his longing to be farming again, now became his old kind self. They worked almost avidly, with ecstasy: "as though Mummy had grown a second pair of hands." Even after dinner the father "did not take a nap as all the other men did in the haymaking season. He repaired the harness, mended shoes, sawed and hammered and glued, fixing things around the house. His bony, city-clean hands were, it seemed, capable of any kind of work. And always they smelled so excitingly—either of pungent cobbler's wax and acid leather, like the hands of Uncle Prokhor, the shoemaker, or of fragrant pine shavings, like those of Matvei Sibiryak, the carpenter.

"When he was at work his father's face lighted up, acquiring a carefree, boyish look. He would stick out his tongue, blow out his cheeks and whistle."

And Shurka, crouching beside him, looked at his father's hands and made use of every moment to talk with him.

"There's nothing a man can't do, Shurka, if only he has the wish and the patience."

"Do you have them—the wish and the patience?"

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<sup>1</sup> Chapters from the second book of the trilogy, *The Freeman*, were published in *Soviet Literature*, No. 8, 1954.



*A Student*

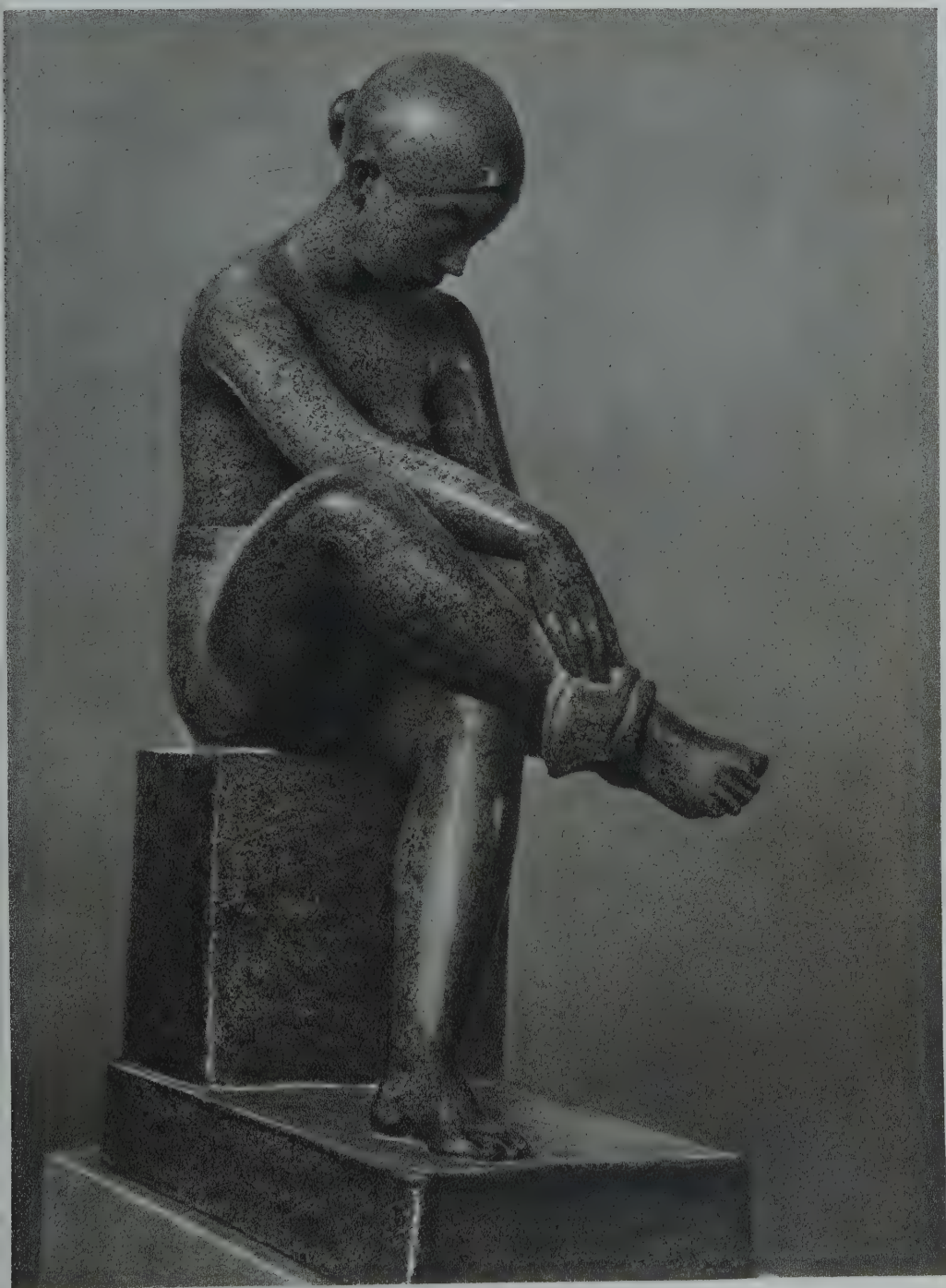
Boris Birgher



*Landscape*  
Tair Salakhov

*Shelunovo Station*  
Victor Ivanov





*Nude*

Vladimir Lempert, Vadim Sidur, Rufim Silis



*Young Builder*

Dina Petrova



*Homebound*  
Remir Stolyarov



*Raftsmen*

Iosif Elgurt



*On the Balcony*

Illarion Golitsin

MARGARITA PERMYAK

*At the Porcelain Works*



*During the Dinner Break*

(porcelain)



*Young Rachmaninov*

Ivan Teneta

“Plenty of wish, but not always the patience.”

The father does indeed lack patience sometimes, or rather not so much patience as endurance. But in those cases the mother comes to his aid. She rarely argues with her husband and never scolds like other women. Not that she “always gave in to him, but that somehow she could inobtrusively, by a word or two casually spoken at the right time, calm down his easily irritated father who was always worrying about something and foreseeing trouble. Her faith in good fortune, in the good side of things, was inexhaustible.”

Perhaps it is this faith in the good, in the future, that makes the most important impression on a child. Shurka was fortunate. This faith did not desert his mother even when things looked darkest for them. It seemed to radiate from within her, lighting up and warming everything about her. This made her stronger than her husband. When he fell into one of his frequent moods of despondency she was able to dispel his gloomy fears. When the children needed petting she was right there with her loving care. Always she was ready to forgive people their weaknesses. Thanks to her, Shurka's home was filled with the radiant atmosphere of love and tender friendship.

Shurka has a good deal of his father in him. Sometimes he shows the same distrust of people, the same doubts and fear of life, but always the faith in everything good that he inherited from his mother prevails, and this gives the boy strength and confidence, helps him to get over misfortunes and hurts. Whatever happens, whatever fearful and cruel surprises await him, he always feels he has his own home behind him as a support and a refuge.

With consummate mastery the author shows how Shurka's love for his mother is at first a vague feeling, an indefinable and inseverable part of himself and her, a natural and permanent bond, and how only later, when they are left without his father during the war, does he begin to understand and admire his mother, and to adopt an attitude of masculine protectiveness towards her.

Little Shurka adores and admires his father; he feels a great need for his father's masculine company and friendship. That he is somewhat fearful of him and quick to take offence at him is just another expression of his deep love and his great longing for his father's love. This is well shown in two chapters: “Morning on the Volga” and “The Thunderstorm”—two summer mornings that Shurka spent alone with his father on the river and in the woods, mornings full of the enchantment of true closeness between them.

At dawn one morning Shurka and his father go fishing on the Volga. The excursion is prompted both by the poor man's hope of getting some extra delicacy for a holiday dinner memories of his own youth (“I love fishing for bream. The number I caught as a boy!”) plus an unconscious desire to get away from everything for a while and spend a few carefree hours on the river, enjoying the early morning air and the pleasures of fishing. The child feels at one with his father that morning and also enjoys the early excursion. “Shurka blinks happily at the rising sun with its promise of a fine day ahead, at the pale lilac sky, the quiet lime-trees and birches—not a leaf was quivering.”

The shepherd's "lessons" have not been wasted on him. "Shurka observes that the flax in the field is not spilling its colour in blue streams and lakes as during the daytime. His father was right: the flax is sleeping soundly, its limpid turquoise eyes tightly closed. Shurka picks a stalk still wet with dew and examines the little cup attentively: the flower has lowered its green lashes. Carefully he picks at them with his fingernail and the blue eye winks out at him."

So, every moment, in every trifle, the tireless little investigator discovers something new for himself in the miraculous world of Nature. Smirnov is in these passages as sensitive to the colours of the world as a painter. All the details he notes speak of the keenness of his eyes and his knowledge of Nature.

Although there are no particular outward demonstrations of affection between father and son (only that, knowing that Shurka would get hungry, the father has providently brought along some bread for him), their shared absorption in the fishing, their shared emotions, the single rhythm of their movements show how much at one they are with each other. Nature seems to bring them still closer together. All the time they carry on a spasmodic but lively, almost boyish conversation.

"He's a cunning fellow, the bream, isn't he?"

"Sensitive. He hears and understands everything."

"Who's more cunning, the bream or the pike?"

"Oh, the pike's a different proposition altogether. He thinks only of himself, while the bream is always ready to lend the next fellow a hand."

Only towards the end of the summer does Shurka have the chance to go on a second outing with his father. This time they go picking mushrooms in a distant woods. As in a folk tale, there is an element of repetition in this chapter: the same light-hearted enjoyment of the fresh morning, the same awareness of the beauty of the world, the same happy closeness to his father, the same simple, intimate exchanges—Shurka's questions and his father's answers, now about the woods and the mushrooms.

But because they are now in a woods and not on the river, because the author has an abundant store of fresh details and observations to draw upon, because the summer is now fading into autumn and the landscape has changed, and even, very likely, because Shurka has grown up a little in the course of the summer, everything looks different in this chapter. Even the dew is different now. It "cooled on the folded leaves like tea poured into a saucer."

Reading these pages we see that Shurka now feels a certain degree of independence from his father. He has just recovered from an illness and it is as though with his recovery he has made a leap and grown up at once. The realization of how very true this is psychologically brings us the explanation of the curiously repetitious character of this chapter. Its purpose is to show us that our little hero has changed, that he has risen to a higher step on the spiral ladder of life.

Father and son come home that day to be stunned by the news awaiting them. War has been declared and the men of the village are already being drafted into the army. With this, with Shurka's father, Uncle Rodion and other peasants going off to the war, the first volume closes, bringing to a close also the

first stage of Shurka's childhood, its earliest, sweetest, most irresponsible period—its spring and summer—when he, still a little boy, carefree and happy, was only “blinking” at the world, discovering all kinds of things, both good and bad, in it, without being able to distinguish between them. As yet he has only been listening to all the voices and sounds of life, eagerly seeking and taking to himself what he found suitable or pleasing, and little affected by misfortunes. His participation in life has been limited to this. It is the adults who have been taking all the action and leading him.

In the second volume Shurka is already an active participant in life. His actions now acquire social value, and there is much for him to think about.

#### 4

The second volume of *Discovery of the World* presents the autumn and winter of Shurka's childhood. Two years have passed between “high summer,” which came to an end with his father's leaving for the front, and this new period, but it is with good reason that the author links this special period in Shurka's life—the period of his growing up, of transition from carefree early childhood to impetuous, pensive and often inexplicably moody boyhood—with autumn.

In the countryside as in the city, for the child of this age autumn begins with school. By the time we meet him again Shurka is long past his first acquaintance with school, his first timid steps in it. He is already in his third year and he and his friends feel at home there. They like school. To them it seems like a palace, although the ceiling leaks badly and Shurka once finds a poisonous mushroom growing under the teacher's desk. They like the gayly coloured, dented globe and the shabby cupboard that is the school “library,” and the spacious classrooms. And most important of all, “the lessons are such fun, so interesting.”

What makes going to the school so interesting is, of course, that the teacher is good and the children love him. The portrait of schoolmaster Grigori Evgenyevich is drawn with tender affection and deep gratitude. But, as is always the case with good writers, this portrait is a composite one. Grigori Evgenyevich is representative of the old village school-teacher as a type.

Smirnov's book does much to round out our conception of the pre-Revolution village school. Though they depicted the life of the impoverished, hard-working village teacher with sympathy and respect, Russian writers generally emphasized the hardness and hopelessness of their lot. How infinitely sad are these stories about schoolmasters who finally take to drowning their sorrows in drink and about lonely schoolmistresses (recall Chekhov's story *The Cart*). Yet there really was profound value and true joy and undaunted heroism in that harsh life of theirs. To shape the minds of little human beings is always fascinating, and the life-purpose of these hard workers was to fill those minds with knowledge and show them a way to a better life. To every teacher his work brought—as it was bound to if only he was himself an alert living being who loved his vocation—at least some moments of joy and affection, and answering waves of affection from his pupils to warm his heart.

- "In Shurka's eyes school meant Grigori Evgenyevich. Books too meant Grigori Evgenyevich, and the desks and the writing paper and the paints the teacher bought his pupils at his own expense, the whole of this extraordinary world of school that was so unlike everything else he knew, that bright, noisy world—it all spelled Grigori Evgenyevich."

5

For all that the narration apparently follows a single line, that the hero's impressions and observations seemingly come about by natural "chance," the book gradually broadens out to embrace a wide range of life and a greater diversity of human characters, to go more and more deeply into increasingly important problems. Beginning as an unpretentious story of the childhood of one village boy, it grows into a significant work that shows us the old Russian village from a new angle.

New, too, and reminiscent of Gorky, is the way in which Smirnov depicts the processes of labour. The smooth team-work that characterizes the threshing, the joyful feeling of rhythm are superbly conveyed in the chapter entitled "Threshing."

The poetry of peasant labour, long a subject of Russian folklore, here appears as the epitomization of inspired collective labour.

The fundamental problem of the Russian peasantry—the problem of land—imprints on Shurka's consciousness in his earliest childhood. His mind, still utterly incapable of grasping the social contradictions of life, is struck by the absurd incongruity of it: there are the vast fields and meadows and woodlands, the great Russian river, the roads running into the boundless distances, everything he sees and has grown accustomed to, and side by side with this a permanent shortage of land that is the curse of everyone in the village, the narrow little strip that cannot feed a family, that forces his father to seek work in the city, leaving behind him his wife and children, the work on the land that he loves and all the joys man derives from Nature. And this great injustice, this astonishing mismanagement becomes especially striking when seen through the eyes of a child.

One other very important point: from the first chapter to the last there is a feeling of connection with the city that is clearly apparent even to a small child. And this connection is presented as being natural and necessary to the village, as a progressive factor.

Want of land drives men from the village to the town where they can find some work. Few of Shurka's fellow villagers have not lived awhile in the city. Uncle Rodion once worked at a factory in St. Petersburg until he was sent packing from it, and there was Prokhor, the smith, and Gorev, who became a revolutionary, and, of course, Shurka's own father.

In Shurka's fancy the city is something fascinating and fearful. From it there comes to the village both good and bad. And, beyond a doubt, the men who have lived in town acquire some advantage over the villagers: they know something

hidden from the latter. The consumptive Prokhor, whose blood has been "sucked dry by the city," is yet stronger than the muzhik because he has a technical skill and because he believes in the working class and the coming revolution. And the Bolshevik Gorev, who comes back to visit his native village only at rare intervals, is already a type altogether new to it, a "political," an organizer of the masses. In the argument about the landlord's meadow and at the fire, everywhere he takes the lead. The very speech of the "townsmen" changes, unfamiliar, incomprehensible words and phrases appear in it. Always the villagers gather about them as though to discover from them something important and decisive that is being hatched in the city. Shurka learns to believe that the city harbours a great and powerful *truth* that men are fighting for, and that that truth has not yet reached the village.

But Shurka learns in time that the city too is divided and turns different aspects to the village. During the war the city came to the village thrice, but in an altogether different form than Shurka had expected. It came in a carriage drawn by a pair of well-fed horses, with bells ringing, first in the form of a moustachioed officer who ordered the men to draw lots to decide who of them were to go and dig trenches, then in the form of civilians in fine coats and gold-rimmed spectacles, "inviolable" officials, who came to take the calves and other livestock from the women, and, lastly, in the form of bearded guards armed with rifles and sabres, commanded by an officer who was quick to draw his revolver and brandish a whip—and these too came to requisition the livestock.

And while the first time the men humbly obeyed the city and drew lots from the scribe's cap, the second time the women proved less tractable than the men, and rebelliously refused to give up their cows. Shurka's mother even drove a rake through the expensive coat of one of the "inviolable" officials in gold-rimmed glasses.

The third time, the city's evil designs were thwarted by a crippled soldier who arrived from the war at the crucial moment.

"Easier, isn't it, Your Excellency, to fight with muzhiks and petticoats than with the Germans?" he remarked.

The crippled soldier was Shurka's father. Shurka and his mother had thought him lost and had mourned him in secret from each other; now he had returned to them minus both legs.

Watching in horror as, hands braced on the snow, he swung his body along the road, Shurka recalls the long, strong legs encased in old down-at-heel boots he had followed through the woods that day the war had started. The vivid memory makes his own legs go weak so that he stands as one paralyzed, unable to take a step towards his father.

In this dramatic closing scene of the book the world reveals itself to Shurka in its principal and strongest aspect. His "discoveries" here reach their culminating point. Watching the city officials with their guards and smartly uniformed officer depart empty-handed, he senses the first victory of the people. But as the cruel price paid for this victory, the crippled soldier lies there on the snow,

the personification of all the great sacrifices of the people. And this cripple is Shurka's father, the person dearest to him in all the world. Never before in his short life did his vision of the world cause him such deep personal pain.

The little hero of *Discovery of the World* is now no longer the same child we met in the opening chapters of the first volume. He has grown and changed, behind him he already has a rich and varied experience of life for so young a boy. He has already learned to see the beauty of this world and to perceive the contradictions of human society; he has come to know the sweetness of friendship, the charm of dreams, and the bitterness of disappointment and loneliness. He has seen death and grief, has himself experienced misfortune and has learned to shoulder duties and to take responsibility for himself and others. He has found living and discovering something new about him every day and every hour intensely interesting. He has already begun to judge this world, for he has learned to think and to love and to hate. His ears have been open to all men, but he has taken closest to his heart the wise words of one of the muzhiks: "Trust yourself, and you won't go wrong. You're a Man too, and Man is everything."

And Shurka has become a man before our very eyes.

One of the principal advantages of literature over the plastic arts, painting and sculpture, for instance, is that the writer can portray a person in the process of development, showing changes in age, character, and time. This gives more life and depth to his representations. The living colours of everyday life, of the country, and of Nature warm and illumine the character. We *see* the man and his actions, hear his words and thoughts, judge of him as of a living being.

If a writer succeeds in making us do this his book is already of merit. That *Discovery of the World* possesses this merit is beyond all question. Not only do we recognize Shurka himself as a living, authentic personality but, through him, the people around him as well. Even the village, the scene of the events our little hero participates in or witnesses, is seen in development.

To draw his incisive picture of the intricate play of forces in the Russian village on the eve of the Revolution, Smirnov chose what on the face of it seems the simple method of letting a child tell the story, that the truth of life might speak through the lips of a child. But this "simple" method required the utmost authenticity, a good knowledge of life and an accurate memory.

With the hero of the book, we take delight in the charm of the Russian natural scene and, most important of all, admire the high human qualities of the toiling peasants: their strong desire for justice and hatred of violence, their shrewd intelligence and humour, their gift for poetry and their large-heartedness. It was these qualities, we realize, that brought the peasantry to the Revolution and the building of a radiant new life.

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## RITERS and ARTISTS FORUM



### INTERVIEW WITH ANATOLI SOFRONOV

*Question:* Won't you please tell us what you have written of late?

*Answer:* I recently finished a play which I call *Retired Officer*. It was staged not long ago by the Mayakovsky Theatre of Moscow.

In it I wanted to tell how the spark of great creative initiative was kindled in the hearts of ordinary Soviet people by the Twentieth Congress of our Party. The main characters in the play are demobilized officers who find their place in peaceful life.

I am now writing a new play, a comedy called *The Cook*. It tells of the life of Kuban collective farmers. The theme and the material in it are very familiar to me. I visited the Kuban frequently and have written about it many a time.

What else can I tell you about my writing? This year has, in a way, been one of summing up my work as a poet: the Publishing House for Fiction and Poetry has put out a volume of my selected verse.

At the same time another book of new poetry, written recently, has come out. It is called *From All Latitudes*, and is about the struggle for peace and friendship of the peoples on our planet.

*Question:* You were abroad very often of late, weren't you?

*Answer:* Yes, I had occasion to visit many lands, among them Japan, India, the U.A.R., Indonesia, Iceland. The impressions of these trips have served as the basis for my travel stories which have been combined in a book called *Five Continents*.

A group of Soviet journalists, myself among them, recently returned from a trip to Latin America. I have tried to tell of this great and interesting voyage in a series of articles which have appeared in the magazine *Ogonyok*.

*Question:* Have you ever had occasion to meet other writers during your trips abroad?

*Answer:* I have, and more than once. I recall some interesting meetings and talks with the Spanish writer Rafael Alberti, the Guatemalan writer Miguel Angel Asturias, the Indian writer Mulk Raj Anand, the Egyptian writer Yousef Elsebai, and many others.

I especially well recall my last meeting with Pablo Neruda in Chile. He received us Soviet journalists very warmly and in many ways helped us to know his country better.

The establishment of personal, creative contacts among writers of various countries and of various political convictions is very important for the strengthening of peace.

*Question:* What else would you like to tell our readers?

*Answer:* I should like to address those foreign writers whom I know and do not know, as editor of the magazine *Ogonyok*. Our journal which is a truly mass social and literary magazine in the Soviet Union (it comes out in an edition of 1.5 million copies) tries to acquaint the readers with the latest works in both Soviet and foreign literature. *Ogonyok* has published stories and poems by writers of China, America, Hungary, England, France, India, Pakistan, the U.A.R. Japan, Iraq, and many other countries. I want to take advantage of this opportunity to say that we hope foreign writers will continue to contribute to our journal. *Ogonyok* will be very glad to make its pages available to them.



## INTERVIEW WITH BERDY KERBABAYEV

We were able to interview Berdy Kerbabayev during the recent conference of writers from the Soviet Central-Asian republics held in Ashkhabad. The veteran Turkmenian writer had just returned from a tour of Turkmenia. In Mari, a district centre, he had met members of literary circles, students from a teachers' training college. In Chardzhou he had attended a conference organized by the literature faculty of the Pedagogical Institute to discuss his latest novel.

In response to our request, Berdy Kerbabayev told us of the work he was doing and of his plans for the future.

"I have just finished my novel *Nebit Dag*. I had for a long time wanted to write a book about Turkmenian oil workers. Before the Revolution there was absolutely no industry in Turkmenia. It was impossible to get a bottle of

paraffin oil for an oil-lamp. But today our own industries supply almost three-quarters of our needs. Oil, of course, occupies first place. Factories, settlements and towns have been built in the dead steppes where heretofore no living being dwelt and which even the birds avoided. But the main thing is that new people have emerged: a working class, an intelligentsia. What was it that struck me most about the people of Nebit Dag, the Turkmenian oil centre? I detected in them a new characteristic: a special sense of responsibility for the common cause. I lived almost three years in Nebit Dag while writing my novel. Its heroes are engineers, geologists and workers. I wanted to show the psychology of the new Turkmenian man, how he lives, how he works and of what he dreams. My novel has already been published in Turkmenian, and a Russian translation is being prepared.

"I wanted it to be not an 'industrial' but a psychological novel. It is difficult for me to say how far I have succeeded, but the novel has been my main work during recent years.

"Then, to mark the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution, I wrote a play based on my novel *The Decisive Step*, and it is now being staged in Turkmenia.

"Now I am working on a six-volume edition of my collected works to be published in Turkmenian.

"In October, 1959, we shall celebrate the 225th anniversary of the birth of the founder of Turkmenian poetry, Makhtum-kuli. One-volume editions of his selected works have once or twice been published in Russian. I am writing a play about his life and work. I want to breathe new life into the image of our national poet—a remarkable man who dedicated his life to the fight for the ideals of freedom.

"If I were asked what a writer needs in order to create something of real value (apart, of course, from talent), I should reply that it is above all necessary that his writing should come straight from the heart, in such a way that it would be impossible for him to go on living without saying what he wanted to say. In other words, without creative fire, without a thirst for life, you cannot be a writer. One must never lose that thirst for life, that constant interest in the people around.

"Some time ago I was asked which books written recently by Soviet writers I liked best. I mentioned the new chapters of Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned*, Tvardovsky's poem *Space Beyond Space*, and Victor Nekrasov's *In the Trenches of Stalingrad*. Though the books are quite different, they have one thing in common which I would describe as an unquenchable thirst to play an active part in life, their authors' desire to contribute to socialist society.

"It is difficult to talk about oneself. But there is one thing that I would like to say. When I wrote *The Decisive Step*, describing the difficult road traversed by the people of Turkmenia in their fight for freedom and happiness, I above all tried to convey the spirit of the times, the thoughts and feelings of those taking part in the struggle of the new against the old. I did not see it as a historical novel. I had the good fortune to live through the events which I described

and I wrote about the people of my own time, whom I knew well and with whom I was able to talk as with old friends.

"We write for the people and about the people. There is no aim more noble or more responsible!"

Our interview drew to its close. Berdy Kerbabayev told us many interesting things about his childhood in a poor peasant family, in which only one of six sons learned to read and write, the turbulent revolutionary events in Central Asia of which he was an eye-witness and participant, and about the happy life of his people in a socialist society.

In parting, Berdy Kerbabayev spoke of his forthcoming visit to the Grand Turkmen Canal, of its scale and importance to the republic.

"We have splendid mellow soil but no water. Give us water, and it will grow what you want—anything at all!"

He spoke of the enormous sums the Soviet Government is spending on the irrigation of the deserts of Central Asia, and it struck me how very much the interests of his people and their work had become a part of the writer's life.



## INTERVIEW WITH VERA KETLINSKAYA

*Question:* Your novel *Courage*<sup>1</sup> is a great favourite among our young readers. Do you still attach chief importance to the *Comsomol* theme?

*Answer:* My works are not entirely devoted to youth, but in all of them young people play an important part. And can it be otherwise? I was brought up by the *Comsomol* and youth's problems lie near my heart. My main theme is the development of the socialist individual. This process, when a person's views,

sensations, moral principles are being moulded into shape, takes place when one is young. Therefore, whatever the subject of my book, it is always dedicated to youth, to those who inherit the accomplishments and achievements of older generations.

Old people are prone to complain that nowadays youth is not what it was in the olden times. We, they claim, were far better, more conscientious, more

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<sup>1</sup> A novel devoted to youth who, through selfless labour, built a new city in the taiga. Published in 1938.

selfless. I hate grumbling of this kind. Youth always burns with the desire to show its worth, to live an interesting and active life, and it rests with us to direct its steps. If there are young people loafing around and killing time and energy on nonsense, the blame lies with us who have failed to open their eyes on to the true meaning and substance of life. But was everything faultless in the days of our youth? True, there were revolutionaries, heroes, enthusiasts. But alongside these there were hooligans and, what was the plague of the first post-war years--waifs and strays. Is it by these, however, that we judge of the entire generation?

I know the youth of the first Five-Year Plans well. I also know present-day youth, the boys and girls who ploughed up virgin soil, who built and continue to build new towns, power plants, mines and mills. Young people today have developed a much higher level of culture and knowledge and their requirements have grown. In this lies the sole difference between the two generations. When a deed of valour is called for, however, they go at it with the same enthusiasm and the same eagerness for romance as ever; they are as anxious to overcome difficulties, to tackle the problems that confront them.

*Question: You have recently visited China. Would you give us your impressions of that country?*

*Answer:* My book *China Today and Tomorrow* has just come off the press. Why "and Tomorrow," you may ask. Because People's China, you see, is in a state of impetuous motion. Wherever you happen to be and whomever you speak to, you are sure to hear of the great plans, of bold undertakings that will transform the country. My trip over China may well be termed "32 days with a camera and an open heart." My camera took down some of the impressions, while my heart absorbed all that I saw and heard. I worked on my book for almost a year afterwards, trying to sort things out for myself and to clear up what is so hard for the outsider to grasp. What I wanted to know was how the people's government of such a multipopulous, multinational, and formerly backward country like China, succeeded in achieving, in such a short time, its incredible progress. In other words, I wanted to understand the soul of the Chinese people.

*Question: You met your Chinese readers, didn't you?*

*Answer:* Yes, many times. And not only at official receptions but at informal gatherings as well. Chinese youth is concerned with the same problems that concern us: how to live, what is good and what is bad, what is true love, happiness.

*Question: Won't you tell us about one of these meetings?*

*Answer:* I describe a meeting of this kind in my book. I have the publisher's copy of it here and I think I'll show you the passage. "I stand face to face with an audience of three thousand--these are workers of heavy industry, the young builders of a new world. Part of them work in Peking, many are soon to leave for the West, North and South-West to build new plants and cities. They have gathered here today under the pretext of meeting the author of *Courage*. But I see through their little ruse; true, the organizers are not very particular about concealing it. What these young people are really interested in is the rich experience of Soviet Comsomols, the experience accumulated at the

first youth construction sites, at Komsomolsk-on-Amur. . . . And for two hours running I give the story of our young men and women, of how they tackled that problem of problems—"how to live." I speak of the spiritual emptiness and wasted lives of those who shrank from difficulties, of the joy of constructive labour and of accomplishment, a feeling that can be appreciated by those only who have themselves overcome difficulties and, with their own hands, built towns and plants. . . .

"Picture a huge, semicircular auditorium bordered by delicate, white columns. Overhead the black, southern sky sparkling with a myriad of large radiant stars such as are only in the south. Rows of benches descend to meet the open stage. There is no table for the presidium; only a few chairs and a small platform with a mike on it. This is the Soviet Industrial Exhibition hall. Behind my back several of the active members of the New Young Democratic League are seated, and facing me, a multitude of young, radiant faces. Their eyes sparkle like those stars above us, and the air, still warm though it is evening, seems to have gained heat. . . .

"I speak, and there is a steady downpour of white notes, fluttering dove-like towards the stage. While my words are being interpreted, I seize the opportunity to look about me, and notice that several people in the back are busily sorting out the notes, while the translator who came with me is busy translating them. . . .

"What would they be like, these notes? What about? I decide, for some reason or other, that they must be out of the ordinary and purely local. Would I be able to answer them? With uncertainty I take hold of the first note and am suddenly transferred to an ordinary reader's conference, somewhere amidst Soviet workers or perhaps students.

"Why did Klava Melnikova refuse to marry Andrei Kruglov?"<sup>1</sup>

"Animation among the audience; especially the young girls prick up their ears. I answer:

"Klava felt that Andrei's love was not true love. She couldn't be content with only partial happiness. A person deserves complete happiness and must never accept compromises from life."

"I gave this answer and wondered whether they would understand what I meant. But a burst of thunderous applause told me that they had understood and approved.

"If a girl says she loves a fellow and is willing to marry him but refuses to follow him to a new construction site, is this love?"

"What is your conception of the meaning and purport of life?"

"What should be the attitude to a volunteer who shies at the first hurdle and takes to flight?"

"What should volunteers do to create a strong community at the site?"

"Tell us something about love; what should it be like among advanced people?"

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<sup>1</sup> Characters from *Courage*.

"Not a single peculiarly 'local' question. These boys and girls surrounding me are very dear and near to me. Pure hearted, cheerful, restless, inquisitive, they demand accurate answers to the most complicated questions. Their mode of life is unlike ours, southern stars sparkle in their heaven, their skin is yellowish, and the shape of their eyes is different; but they are old and intimate friends of mine. These are the builders of a new world, the first generation of socialism. I am at home, among my kindred!"

*Question: Thank you. This is most interesting. Evidently emancipated peoples, and youth in particular, have something in common which is stronger than all differences. Tell us, please, what are you working on at present?*

*Answer:* I am working on a new novel devoted to our contemporaries. I have set myself a difficult but interesting objective: to take my characters through a period of two decades. Those who were young and getting their first taste of life in the last pre-war years when the story begins, reach a mature age as it is brought to a close, while those who were children at the time, grow up and strike out on their own. The main theme of the novel is creative work, the tortuous ways and means that lead to scientific knowledge, the problems of fame and duty, friendship and strife, love and honour. The majority of the characters are young, and the problems raised in the book are identical with the ones young people meet with and have to tackle in real life. The novel will consist of two volumes, the first of which I hope to finish by the end of this year.

The chief characters are three young chemists who have made an important discovery and thereupon devote their lives to its realization. They set about it in firm confidence that success will soon be theirs. They are not deprived of ambition and other human weaknesses; however, they come to understand subsequently that a new undertaking, whatever it is, requires struggle, strenuous effort and sacrifice. It is my objective to show, through the destiny of my heroes, that scientific and technical progress is a complicated process, a collective effort, that success rarely comes easily and of its own accord if it is to be at all durable, that all the brilliant achievements in science are the result of the imperceptible and continuous efforts of a multitude of working people. One of the characters, a middle-aged hydrotechnician, is possessed by a great dream which, however, proves as premature as Icarus' attempts to fly. The legend of Icarus, however, anticipated 20th-century aviation. Dreams which appear before their time often sound ridiculous, but in the long run, bear fruit and are essential.

Generally speaking, my novel will be devoted to two generations; it will reflect the growth and development of Soviet youth, their inner world, their attitude towards labour and their associates.

All my life, in the main, I have been closely concerned with the new psychological features which come to the fore and develop under socialism, under freedom of creative labour. This novel of mine will sort of sum up my observations and reflections on this score.

There is much I have to say about life, and I pray for the strength and time to do so.

# LITERARY MAGAZINES REVIEWED

Dmitri NIKOLAYEV

## Problems of Literature

A new magazine dealing with questions of literary theory, history and criticism, *Voprosi Literatury* (Problems of Literature) made its appearance among Soviet literary periodicals in the middle of 1957.

These questions were, of course, regularly considered before in the *Bulletin of the Literature and Language Department of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences*, in the *Literary Heritage*, and in the many *Research Papers* published by the universities and educational institutes and also in the literary magazines—*Novy Mir*, *Znamya*, *Zvezda*, etc. But as a result of a new increase in cultural interests in the Soviet Union, these magazines have in recent years become inadequate. The need for a periodical which would concentrate theoretical and critical thought began to make itself felt. Proposals for a journal of this kind came not only from philologists and writers but also from many readers.

And so the magazine was born. The first issues carried many articles that aroused wide interest, among them Alexander Karaganov's "Lenin and the Party's Work in Literature," in which the author examines the views of the great leader of the proletariat on the role of art in the social struggle, and also a series of articles in the section headed "Problems of Realism." These include articles by a number of prominent Soviet literary historians and critics. Alexander Ivashchenko's article "Critical Realism and Socialist Realism"

deals mainly with French literature. Analyzing the writings of Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, Anatole France, Romain Rolland, Henri Barbusse, and Louis Aragon, he spotlights the characteristic features of critical realism and shows their further development in the works of socialist realism.

In his "The Problem of Realism and Literature in the East," Nikolai Konrad, examining the history of Chinese and Japanese literatures and comparing the major works of these literatures with the masterpieces of French realism of the middle of the 19th century, concludes that the term "realism" in its European meaning can be applied to the literatures of other peoples only if they developed in social, economic and cultural conditions akin to those of Europe.

There are many interesting observations and comments in Sergei Petrov's "Realism as a Literary Method," in Victor Pertsov's "Realism and Modernist Trends in Russian Literature at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," and in Korneli Zelinsky's "Common Characteristics in National Literatures."<sup>1</sup>

Articles on problems of realism also appeared in subsequent issues. A major article by Yakov Elsberg (No. 4 and 5 for 1958) "The Problems of Realism and the Tasks of Literary Scholarship" expresses the point of view of the editors and sort of sums up the discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> The last two articles were published in shortened form in our magazine (No. 12 for 1957 and No. 5 for 1958).

The theoretical articles generalize the experience not only of Russian classical and modern Soviet literature, but also of the literatures of other peoples. The same purpose is also pursued by the various sections of the magazine such as that of "Aesthetics," "History of Literature," and "Literary Criticism." These contain articles dealing with the history of the literatures of the peoples of the U.S.S.R., folklore, the literary and critical views of outstanding writers, new trends in art and literature both in the Soviet Union and abroad, etc.

Even this brief enumeration indicates that the magazine endeavours to give a genuinely broad presentation of the most varied literary questions, from Pushkin's works to our time, from the aesthetics of Schiller to the writings of the present-day specialists in art and literary theory. A number of articles, including a polemical feature by Vitali Ozerov entitled "Falsehood Dies but Facts Remain," are directed against the dangers of revisionism in the theory and practice of modern art.

Leonid Pinsky's article on "The Tragic Element in Shakespeare" and Yuri Vipser's review "The Attempts to Create a 'Molière question'" are of undoubted interest.

There is also a great deal of valuable material in the section entitled "Documents and Reports," which presents research materials and archive documents.

One issue contained materials on Alexander Fadeyev's work on his articles, an account of Gorky's unpublished correspondence with foreign writers and a report on the preparations of an Academic edition of Turgenev's letters (about 6,500 in all).

The magazine carries also reviews of new Soviet and foreign books on literary criticism, and publishes a detailed "Information" section which reports items of interest from the previous month's work in the research institutes of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, the philological faculties, and the educational institutes and lists new books on literary history and criticism.

Mistakes and shortcomings are inevitable in any new venture. They are also to be found in *Voprosi Literatury*. But the magazine is gaining new readers from among those interested in the theory and history of literature with every issue.

Mael SAMOILOVA

## New Material on Chekhov

A Rostov-on-Don periodical called *The Don* regularly publishes fresh historico-literary data. In the course of the past year it issued a series of articles on the lives of Maxim Gorky, Sergei Esenin, Vyacheslav Shishkov and Alexander Green, as well as reminiscences of Fyodor Chaliapin by Ivan Bunin, written after the singer's death and appearing in Soviet press for the first time.

Of particular interest is the material devoted to Anton Chekhov. Reminiscences of the writer by his sister, Maria Pavlovna Chekhova, appeared in Nos. 1-3, 1957, of *The Don*.

Maria Chekhova held a special place in the life of the great writer. Her entire life was devoted to her brother and she was a staunch friend and helpmate of his. Herself a teacher and gifted artist (she was a pupil of the outstanding painters, Korovin and Levitan), she took to heart everything concerning Chekhov. After his death, Maria Chekhova (she outlived him by half a century) did much to promote the publication of his works, letters and other material. The latter re-create various details from the life of the Chekhov family, give vivid depictions of their sojourns in Moscow, Bakhino, Voskresensk, describe Chekhov's meetings with the writers Grigorovich and Korolenko, with Chaikovsky, etc.

Maria Chekhova quotes a letter from their brother, Alexander, dated July 9th, 1888, in which we read the following: "Grigorovich has bought a volume of Anton's stories, notwithstanding my offer to forward him one at request. Anton's works are his constant companions, in Russia and abroad. He reads them, makes marginal notes, and probably bores his fellow-travellers to death. . . . A more ardent admirer and zealous propagator of Anton's popularity I have never met." Alexander Chekhov quotes Grigorovich as saying: "Tell your brother that the phrase in which he compares the dawn with the shimmering glow of dying coals would have done credit to Turgenev, were he alive. . . . Many are the charming passages in his books. I mark them all. What talent! What power!"

In her reminiscences Maria Chekhova reproduces a letter from Levitan, dated 1897. "What a delight is Chekhov's *The Peasant*," he exclaims. "It is stupendous! The compactness he reaches is outstanding. I am overcome!"

No. 7, 1957, of *The Don* carries a number of hitherto unknown letters of Chekhov's. Unusually interesting is that of January 29th, 1883, which contains significant details of his life in Moscow. "Life is tolerable; but as to my health—alack and alas! I work like a slave, go to bed in the small hours. Am doing commission work for various periodicals, and there can be nothing worse than working against time. I do work for Moscow and St. Petersburg periodicals, have become popular, have made everyone's acquaintance. . . . Life seems to treat me well." And a very interesting postscript:

"A. Chekhov or: A. Chekhonte, M. Kovrov—The Man Without a Spleen. These are the signatures I use at the 6 or 7 publications to which I am contributing."

For Chekhov's biographers this was something to go by, for they had known nothing of the existence of the pen-name "M. Kovrov" hitherto. This discovery enabled Boris Chelyshev, a literary scholar, to bring to light three stage feuilletons of Chekhov's which give us a better understanding of the early works of the writer. He came across them in an 1883 issue of the magazine *Zritel* (The Spectator).

In his interesting and vivid reminiscences of Chaliapin (*The Don*, No. 10, 1957), Ivan Bunin tells how Chaliapin's acquaintance with Chekhov came about. "I remember how passionate his desire to meet Chekhov was, how many times he spoke of it to me. At long last I asked him:

"Well, what's the hitch?"

"Chekhov never steps out," he answered. "I can't find the opportunity to introduce myself."

"For goodness sake, what opportunity do you need! Take a cab and off you go."

"But I wouldn't want to appear cheeky. I'll be so shy, I'm sure, that he'll take me for a downright fool. Now, if you could take me up there under some pretext."

"I lost no time in complying and was convinced of the truth of his words. Upon entering the room he blushed to the roots of his hair and began mumbling something incoherent. . . . But he left in high spirits.

"You can't conceive how delighted, now charmed I am to have made his acquaintance! There's a man for you, there's a writer!"

The new material on Chekhov published by *The Don* has caused lively interest, and not only among philologists, but among the broad reading public as well.

Chekhov's correspondence with the young writer, Rimma Vashchuk, appeared in the January issue, 1957, of the monthly *Molodaya Gvardia* (Young Guard). Upon her request that he read her stories, Chekhov was quick to comply. "I am glad to be of service to you," he wrote, "and shall be greatly pleased to read your manuscripts and let you know my opinion of them." However, on the very day this letter was written, March 22nd, 1897, Chekhov took seriously ill and was forced to go to hospital.

Notwithstanding the seriousness of his condition (as a doctor, he was fully alive to the danger), he read both of Vashchuk's stories at the hospital, and by the 27th of March his answer was ready. Not only did he express his opinion about her stories, but he gave her many practical hints and told her what were, in his opinion, the problems that literature should concern itself with. In his criticism of her *Tale* about fairies and gnomes, he wrote: "Drop this kind of stuff. You should strive to be a true artist. Depict life as it is, or as it should be in your view. One must draw pictures." The young authoress took offence and sent in an ill-tempered reply. Whereupon Chekhov immediately responded with a patient repetition of the advice he had given her. "It is not for me to decide whether you write or not. I mentioned your youth because when a person reaches the age of 30 or 40 it is too late to begin. I pointed out the importance of studying the correct usage of punctuation marks because in a work of art they play part of notes in music. They cannot be learned from a text-book; they require flair and experience."

Chekhov's correspondence with Rimma Vashchuk was prepared for publication by Emma Polotskaya, and is of interest to young writers in particular.

No. 5, 1957, of the literary monthly *Moskva* reproduces inscriptions to a series of drawings entitled *Moscow Sights* done by Anton Chekhov's brother, Nikolai. They were

first discovered in one of the April, 1882, issues of *Zritel*. There is nothing directly indicative of Chekhov's authorship about them, but after a careful comparison of data, the publisher Nikolai Podorolsky arrived at the conclusion that these brief, playful inscriptions were his. *Moskva* deserves credit for its initiative in publishing Nikolai Chekhov's witty drawings in the bargain, for, together with the text they constitute a single whole.

A passage from Maria Chekhova's reminiscences, *My Friend Lika*, appeared in No. 6 of *Moskva*. Lika, short for Lydia Mizinova, was a friend of the Chekhovs. She loved Anton Chekhov with a lasting and unaffected love. The story of her relations with the writer Potapenko is reflected in Chekhov's *The Sea-Gull*. Maria Chekhova quotes several of Mizinova's letters to her which shed light on the mental distress Mizinova was suffering while in Paris, and which confirm the profound love and respect she felt for Chekhov.

No. 22, 1957, of *Brief Reports of the Institute of Slavonic Studies of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences* has produced Chekhov's correspondence with his Czech translators. This publication (prepared by A. Ignatyeva) sheds new light on how Czech writers got acquainted with the works of the distinguished Russian writer. Till now, the first story of Chekhov's to be translated into the

Czech language was considered to be *The Duel*, published in Prague in 1897. As a matter of fact, Chekhov's story *Happiness* had been translated as early as 1888, while the next year saw the appearance of the translation of his story *A Legal Case*. Eleven of Chekhov's letters to Bořivoj Prusík, one of the most efficient translators of his and other Russian writers' works, are gathered in the Prague National Archives. Chekhov's letters to Prusík had been considered lost, and in Chekhov's Complete Works Prusík was referred to as an addressee of unknown letters. Now these letters have been published in *The Reports*. "I assure you," Prusík wrote to Chekhov, "that there are few contemporary Russian writers who enjoy the popularity equal to yours among Czech readers."

Prusík's letters carry information not only on translations of Chekhov's works in Czechoslovakia but shed light on the tremendous success of his plays in Prague. (*Uncle Vanya* was produced in other towns as well—in Čáslav, Nymburk and Hradec-Králové.)

In his answers to Prusík, Chekhov expressed deeply-felt gratitude and high approval of his work. "Allow me to press your hand and to thank you cordially for your excellent translations," he writes in one of his letters.

Chekhov, it furthermore appears, has advised Prusík to translate Gorky's *The Philistines*, and had sent him a copy of this revolutionary play.



# Books in Review

## Youth of Today

Anatoli Kuznetsov, *Sequel to a Legend*.  
Moscow, 1958.

Our readers had a chance to get acquainted with *Sequel to a Legend*, a new book by Anatoli Kuznetsov, a young writer who is as yet in the early stages of his career, from extracts published in No. 11 of our magazine for 1957. We return to it because it develops one of the main and most fruitful trends of Soviet literature—the affirmation of the creative significance of life, of the ethic of labour, as the basis of human life. Time and events constantly supplement this theme and determine its new expression.

The charm of *Sequel to a Legend* lies above all in the character of Anatoli, its hero—a straightforward, modest and perceptive young man, in the lyrical quality of the narrative, and in its light and easy style.

Having graduated from secondary school but having failed to get into an institute, the youngster, in a confused state of mind, finds himself on the Moscow-Irkutsk train. This situation becomes the point of departure for a truthful story. Anatoli's first reaction to his unexpected trip is not one of excitement at the romance it holds in store, but that of despair. He sees it as a leap into the unknown by a "helpless puppy." He is far from being sure that so clear and irrevocable a decision—to take part in one of the great Siberian construction projects—is indeed the way "to be worthy," to use his own words. That is why his attitude to the world at large is so captious and intent.

The friendly, noisy carriage full of so many different people, chance encounters on the way, even the smallest impressions—all

these become subjects for his research into the question "How must one live?"

On arrival at Irkutsk, one of the largest cities of Eastern Siberia, Anatoli frequently remembers the warnings of Victor, his classmate, that he will encounter egoism and indifference. But why then should Leonid, the carpenter working on the Irkutsk hydroelectric power station, spend a whole day showing him round the construction site and persuading him to stop there and work? Why should he take him to the chief engineer and help him to do all the paper-work and settle down in a hostel? What sort of egoism is this? Leonid is in love with the construction site; he wishes everybody well and believes that there is nothing more interesting and worthwhile for a man than to build the Irkutsk power station. So Anatoli unexpectedly finds himself a concrete worker—and how good it is after weeks of hesitation and confusion to feel oneself not just a tourist or an onlooker, but someone who is really necessary!

But to decide to become a builder is only half the story. It is necessary to learn how to work. Our young hero enters into a new stage of learning how to live.

A brief biographical note about the author was given in the magazine *Yunost*, where the story was first published. It said that Anatoli Kuznetsov, a student of the Moscow Literary Institute, going to the Irkutsk power station and working there as a concrete worker, first thought of writing a documentary. However the range of questions touched upon by the author led him to write something of a different type. But the documentary element and precision play an important and positive role in dealing with the psychological problem set out in this lyrical story.

The work process is described with simplicity, vigour and skill. In getting such a clear picture, the reader gains a new respect for the cheerful girls who, after a hard day's work, study or change into their gay frocks and go dancing until the early hours. On the other hand, in going more deeply into the difficulties of the hero's trade, the reader begins to understand just how it comes about that such a fine youngster with such good intentions suddenly breaks down, becomes timid and wants to quit. It is not just because in any "good" book the hero must have shortcomings and faults which he must correct and overcome, but simply because it is always difficult to learn how to live independently and work well. It needs will-power, determination and help from sound people. And when Anatoli finally decides to stay the reader feels a sense of relief as a result of a small but nevertheless real victory.

There are many fine people around Anatoli. The author makes good use of his limited space and succeeds in sketching several expressive portraits.

Probably many people passing a building site, or seeing a railway repair team, or a group of workers asphaltting a road have sometimes noticed one particular girl and wondered how it is possible to retain such feminine grace in those clumsy overalls, that thick jacket and that faded headscarf pulled down right over the eyes? Even while doing the most arduous work her movements remain light and fluid. Anatoli's new girl friend, the object of his new-born love, the tender, quiet and tireless "Tonya with the raven brows" is one of such.

Together with her is the snub-nosed Valya Fedorova, so attractive in her love for her small son, and the independent, determined and lively songstress Tamara.

An important part belongs to Zakhar Zakharych, a 60-year-old bachelor chauffeur, an old Communist, a decent and modest worker.

"What would you do, Dad, if you had your time over again?"

"Just the same."

"On the armoured train?"

"Yes."

"Well, and what would you do in my place?"

"Build the Irkutsk power station."

During the damming up of the river—an important event in the life of the people and in his own—Anatoli, sharing the univer-

sal feeling of festive enthusiasm, feeling his solidarity with thousands of others and seeing the beauty of the culmination of millions of individual efforts, finally comes to realize that he made no mistake in his choice.

*Ekaterina Starikova*

## Romance of Construction

*The Lights of the Zhiguli.* An Anthology. Kuibyshev, 1958.

**T**he Kuibyshev Publishing House recently published *The Lights of the Zhiguli*. On its title page we read "By the Builders of the Hydroelectric Power Station."

It is an anthology of the most varied kinds of writing, from the journalistic *Brief Notes* of the head of the construction project Ivan Komzin to the vaudeville *The First Meeting* by Victor Belousov, an engineer.

"The group of authors, who appear in this anthology," writes the secretary of the project's Communist Party organization Alexander Murysev in the introduction, "has been formed during the years the power station was under construction. The literary club of the newspapers *The Power-Station Builder* and *For Communism* united the diffuse amateur writers. . . . All of them lived the life of the project and in greater or lesser degree took part in the most difficult key tasks."

Almost all the contributions in the anthology deal with the people and work of the great Kuibyshev project.

The reader not only sees the different stages of the construction work, but also gains a clear insight into the character of the man of our time.

The contributions reflect one of the characteristic features of Soviet man, that of responsibility for the job in hand; his proprietary attitude—in the best sense of the word—not only to his own job, but also to the whole project.

This feeling of responsibility is described in the poems by Yezhikov, the skipper of a floating dredge, entitled *The Girl Welder* and *The Master*, in those by foreman Nikolai Medvedev *The Builder* and *The Valiant*, and in many others.

The authors tell how construction work makes people courageous and resolute, and how a feeling of pride for their profession takes root in their hearts.

The story of Boris Chuprin, as told by Sergei Melentyev, is of great interest.

Ever since childhood Boris had dreamed of becoming a sailor. All his life he had worn a seaman's jersey and in moments of danger cried "Beware!" like a veteran sailor. But as things turned out he became an engineer and was put in charge of cranes.

Melentyev once asked Chuprin did he miss the sea.

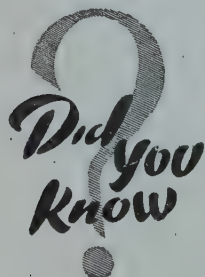
"Miss the sea? What is there to miss? Here I am building a second sea in my life. We build it and we sail on it. So I didn't become a sailor, but a builder of seas. That's even more interesting!"

Builder of seas! That is no figure of speech, but a literal definition of the new profession of man, full of poetry and romance.

Maxim Gorky once urged that histories of factories and mills be written. The building of a modern hydroelectric power station is equal to many factories, all subordinated to a single will and purpose. But while the ordinary factory lasts scores of years and it is never too late to write its history, the life of a power-station construction project is very short. When the job is done the people go to other sites. How is it possible to write the history of a "factory" which has already ceased to exist? In this case the anthology, written by the builders of the power station, will prove of great value.

This book, although it has only just been published, has already become an interesting document, conveying the spirit of the great project, the excitement and difficulties, the joys and victories shared by the great team of builders.

Cecil Chimiskian



Who was the first in modern times to call himself a philologist?

The German scholar, Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824) is commonly believed to be that man. In 1777, when he was about to enter the Göttingen University, the question being put to him as to what he intended to be, he replied: *Studiosus philologiae*.

Later, as professor at a special university course, Wolf defined philology as "the science of antiquity"—*Altertumswissenschaft*.

Approximately 20 years prior to this, however, the Russian writer and scholar Vasili Tredyakovsky (1703-1769), a prominent connoisseur of ancient literature, left an inscription in verse under his portrait to the effect that he was an "industrious philologist." F.A. Wolf's conception of philology was limited to the classical field only; Tredyakovsky's approach, on the other hand, was much broader.

The Gorky Institute of World Literature and the Institute of Russian Literature of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences have undertaken the publication of a three-volume edition called *History of Russian Literature*. This collective work gives a general picture of the development of Russian literature throughout a period of more than nine centuries, from its birth up to the Great October Socialist Revolution.

The Leningrad department of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences Publishing House has already put out the first volume of this *History*. It discusses the problems of ancient Russian and 18th-century literature, and contains papers by Corresponding Members of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences Varvara Adrianova-Perets and Dmitri Likhachov, by Professors Pavel Berkov, Mikhail Skripil, and others.

Dmitri Blagoi, Corresponding Member of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, is the chief editor of the new publication.

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About 70 sculptures by outstanding Russian sculptors of the second half of the 19th century are on display at the exhibition which opened at the Tretyakov Art Gallery in Moscow last August.

The work of the remarkable sculptor Mark Antokol-

sky is most fully presented at the exhibition. There are also on display the works of Alexander Opekushin, Fyodor Kamensky, Matvey Chizhov, Vladimir Beklemishev, Evgeni Lanceret, Artemi Ober, etc.

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The Institute of Russian Literature of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences (Pushkin House) has received a valuable collection of manuscripts of the 15th-19th centuries. It was obtained by Vladimir Malyshev, senior scientific worker of the Institute, from the Ust-Tsilma district of the Komi A.S.S.R., where he had gone on a scientific mission.

These ancient Russian manuscripts were acquired from collective farmers, fishermen, and hunters who live in the north. Of great interest are historical stories, legends, specimens of ancient poetry, and also peasants' letters of the 18th-19th centuries, which contain important material on the history of the Pechora region.

Some ancient poetry, *On Beggar Brethren*, directed against the princes and boyars, is particularly noteworthy.

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The Institute of Art, Folklore and Ethnography of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences has prepared for the press

three volumes of folklore recordings made in the village of Zyatkiivtsy, Vinnitsa region. All five thousand folklore pieces which are included in the edition have been collected by Gnat Tantsura, a school-teacher, in the one village. The section called "Holidays in the Village of Zyatkiivtsy" contains some 150 dances, wedding and other ritual songs.

Tantsura's fellow-villagers often come to his home in the evenings for their own "festivals" of folk bards and narrators of folk tales. Legends, sayings, proverbs and *chastushkas* (two- or four-line humorous folk verse)—all come in for their share. This collector of folklore has recorded over a thousand songs, riddles, proverbs and tales from the lips of Yevdokiya Zuikha, one of the oldest inhabitants of the village.

Tantsura has been engaged in this favourite work of his for forty years. Professional choruses and ensembles as well as amateur art groups often draw material from his collections.

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The number of languages in which the works of Mayakovsky are read abroad and the number of his works published there keep growing all the time.

One-volume editions of his selected works have appeared in recent years in the French

language, *Poetry and Prose* (Paris, 1957, translated by Elsa Triolet, 2nd enlarged edition); in English, *Mayakovsky and His Poetry* (Bombay, 1955, translated by Herbert Marshall, 3rd enlarged edition); in the Slovak language, *Selected Works* (Bratislava, 1955, translated by Rudolf Skukálek); in the Korean language, *Selected Works* (Pyongyang, 1957).

A number of selected works by Mayakovsky and of separate publications of his poems *Vladimir Ilyich Lenin* and *Good!* were put out in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Poland, Brazil, Korea, and China (1955-1958).

Very popular are Mayakovsky's plays. *The Bedbug* and *The Bath-House* came out in the Italian language (Rome, 1957), *The Bedbug*, in Spanish (Buenos-Aires, 1956), a collection of articles *The Theatre*, in the Rumanian language (Bucharest, 1957), and *The Bedbug*, in the Czech language (Prague, 1955).

In a number of countries the publication of the poet's

collected works was undertaken in 1956-1957, a fact which shows his great popularity abroad.

A 10-volume edition of Mayakovsky's works has begun to appear in Czechoslovakia, a 4-volume edition in Hungary, and a 3-volume edition in Poland. Volumes of his writings are also being put out in China and Argentine. Japan is preparing to publish a 3-volume edition of his works.

Four years ago Rostislav Kendenbil came to Leningrad Conservatoire from distant Tuva. He showed several songs he had written to the selection commission and was admitted to the composer's department of the Conservatoire music school. His songs *We Sing Our Party*, *We Are for Peace*, *Song of Working People*, and a piece for the violin and piano were performed at student annual review concerts.

Kendenbil graduated from the music school this year and returned to Tuva. For his graduation diploma he wrote an opera called *Chechen and Belékmaa* based on Tuva folk tales (libretto by the Tuva writer Stepan Saryg-ool). The examining commission highly appraised *Chechen and Belékmaa*, the first national Tuva opera.

The Leningrad Research Institute of the Theatre, Music and Cinematography possesses unpublished letters and manuscripts of outstanding West-European composers who were on friendly terms with eminent figures in Russian music.

Of great interest are three unpublished marches of the Italian composer Gioacchino Rossini. They are dedicated to victories of Russian troops. Rossini also wrote a piece for the 'cello dedicated to the well-known Russian music figure, Matvei Vielgorsky.

# L ETTERS TO AND FROM THE EDITORS

*Vadim Kozhevnikov's novel, Meeting the Dawn (published in issue No. 7 of our magazine) brought in quite a number of appreciative letters from our readers. Below we publish one of them addressed to the author through our magazine and Vadim Kozhevnikov's reply.*

## CONGRATULATIONS ON A FINE BOOK!

Dear Comrade Kozhevnikov,

I want to express my deep appreciation of your story *Meeting the Dawn*, of which I have read that portion published by *Soviet Literature* (English Edition), No. 7.

From the literary viewpoint (I am a writer and ex-critic) I am impressed by its quality as a novel. The characters are convincing. The good that is in them comes through their weaknesses. Even the strong ones have them—weaknesses of their very strength: Khomyakov kills himself because he considers he failed as a Communist.

One sees the good ones unglamorised. One sees the bad ones written without caricature. One understands the counter-revolutionaries, the bandits, the dispossessed—that rotting mass that was part of the old society—nurturing the belief that the workers and peasants will fail. Their contempt for the “backward,” “illiterate,” “heavy-minded” peasants and workers that so short a time before they robbed, and starved, and beat and murdered, because they viewed them as animals.

How stupid the belief. How vain the hope. Many of the reactionaries in China today—perhaps not so many today; there has been a rectification campaign; but yesterday—had the same belief.

I have congratulated *Soviet Literature* for publishing the portion of Volume II, and expressed my thanks, feeling a personal gain in having read it. I hope to read the whole of it later.

As I read it through, it brought back to me those days that shook the capitalist world to its foundations, and filled every Socialist with indescribable enthusiasm.

To all under fifty years of age, the great October days are history. I find so many Communists of various countries, including my own, who appear to have forgotten the events of the decade and a half after 1917. Understandable, but not excusable, in the younger comrades; unforgivable in the older comrades. Yet it is so. They need a reminder. And *Meeting the Dawn* is an illuminative, vividly descriptive, moving reminder to them that, to the heroic workers and peasants of Russia fell the task of building the world's first socialist society. They paid in hardship, want, suffering, torture and wholesale death on the battlefields against the armies and agents of the great imperialist powers. And, in the building, under unbelievably difficult conditions, they suffered no less harshly.

They built not only for themselves but for all the workers of the world. They built, hundreds of thousands of them, conscious of the fact that they would not taste the benefits of the new world they were constructing.<sup>a</sup>

Under the leadership of the Party and guided by the wisdom of Lenin, they not only blazed the trail, *they made the road*. They hewed it through a forest and mountain of difficulties. They were the pioneers. They made errors. Looking back, one marvels that they made so few. They suffered from the theoretically unstable, the vain, the arrogant, the impetuous, the misguided, the treacherous. Externally they were the subject of relentless hostility.

And every country which has since taken the Marxist-Leninist road, or hopes to do so, benefits from the errors and the difficulties no less than from the triumphs that the great Soviet Union has experienced in the last forty-one years.

Workers for Socialism throughout the world owe a great debt to the workers and peasants of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party which has led them triumphantly through all their difficulties. It is a debt that can never be fully repaid.

My congratulations on a fine book!

Comradely Greetings

Norman FREEHILL

## YOURS WAS THE LETTER OF A FRIEND

Dear Comrade Freehill,

Thank you very much for your letter. It has moved me deeply and afforded me much joy.

When a piece of work is finished and what was a manuscript becomes a book, it takes on an independent life of its own and the author becomes increasingly, and uneasily, aware of its imperfections.

Your words of praise for *Meeting the Dawn* mean very much to me. In writing this book about the early days of the Revolution in Siberia I tried to keep within the

confines of my own childhood impressions. The building of a new society by the Bolsheviks for the sake of a better life for man brought my little hero an awareness of a world of new human relations.

The Communist Party has always devoted its creative energies to the effort to make man better. My purpose was to show how in the first years of the Revolution the Bolsheviks in a remote little Siberian town selflessly dedicated themselves to this great creative work, the work of remoulding man.

I wrote the novel with a proud sense of the heroic path travelled by the Russian people, whom the Party has led into our present day—the consummation of everything the early workers of the Revolution ever dreamt of.

I was particularly pleased to hear from you, Comrade Freehill, because you are among those who fought for the new human society at a time when that society was only just beginning to dawn.

What a good and useful thing it would be if you were to write a book about that. There is nothing men need more today than an awareness of their international unity in the struggle for peace. I know you as a prominent fighter for peace and a book of this sort would be one more powerful weapon in that fight. And to us, Soviet readers, it would be especially welcome.

Yours was the letter of a friend and I thank you for it.

Best luck to you and to the people of your country.

*Vadim KOZHEVNIKOV*

**THE EDITORS OF "SOVIET LITERATURE"**  
**WISH THEIR READERS A HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

**Vasili Zhuravlyov** was born in 1914 in Tulinovka village, Tambov region. In his youth he worked as builder on construction sites and then went to study at the Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow. In 1941 he volunteered to the army. After the war he entirely devoted himself to literary work.

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